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**UNDERSTANDING SPORT AND
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
PARTICIPATION IN THE
TRANSITION INTO EARLY MID-
LIFE**

LINDSAY JOANNE FINDLAY-KING

PhD

2008

**UNDERSTANDING SPORT AND
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
PARTICIPATION IN THE
TRANSITION INTO EARLY MID-
LIFE**

LINDSAY JOANNE FINDLAY-KING

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the requirements of the University of
Northumbria for the degree of Doctor of
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and Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

In my thesis I explain patterns and developments of current participation in sport and physical activity among a group of men and women in the transition to early mid-life (38-43 years of age). I examine their perceptions of the activity and sense of sporting identity over their lives. There is limited research on mid-life experiences of sport and physical activity and more often this takes a social survey approach. The interpretive research on mid-life is still an emerging field, previous research has often focused on a single sport sub-culture, those who are heavily involved in sport, or women only.

In depth, topical life history interviews and written timelines were completed with a group of sixteen individuals in this life stage, with varied experiences of sport and physical activity. The data was analysed using Brown and Gilligan's (1992, 1993) 'voice centred relational method' of analysis, followed by 'constant comparison' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

The major theme identified in this study was the complex construction of sport and participation, understood as it relates to the participants lives as a whole and its impact on their participation decision making. Sub-themes included; the different meaning and value of sport and self definition in relation to this, and changes in these across the life course (particularly the transition to midlife) and in relation to the ageing process and relationships. The research demonstrates the relationship between sport and the needs at this life stage, highlighting identity management, and values placed on the ethic of care and sport and physical activity as leisure. Conflicting feelings are experienced in relation to sport and physical activity due to constraints on and into participation. Further to this the thesis provides a grounded theory model of the construction of these activities in the transition to early midlife.

The findings were interpreted with theoretical perspectives from: structuration (Giddens, 1979, 1984), dramaturgical (Goffman, 1971, 1972a), relational (Gilligan, 1993), role (Kelly, 1983; Turner, 1956, 1978; Zurcher, 1970, 1979), life cycle (Levinson et al, 1978, 1996), family life cycle (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975), and role transition (Kelly, 1983) theories.

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**For Roddy and Georgia Findlay, Mary and Michael King
with love**

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Name: Lindsay J. Findlay-King

Signature:

Date:

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 STUDY CONTEXT

A search of the websites of Government Departments for Health, and Culture, Media and Sport¹ reveals that worries about public sport participation and physical activity (PA) levels have been regularly expressed in ministers' speeches since the early 1980s. Likewise, recent media coverage expressing concern about growing health problems for the nation is nothing new (Bryant, 2006; Jones, 2006). Despite considerable efforts to encourage participation, low levels of activity remain a persistent problem. In 2004, Sport England² invited a group of eminent academics and Sport Council senior researchers to look at 'driving up sport participation'. Rowe's thoughts sum up the current problem:

The situation in which we find ourselves is that participation rates have remained stubbornly static and inequities in participation between different social groups have continued largely unchanged over the last 30 years or so with perhaps the exception of more women taking part in fitness related activities. There are significant and growing numbers of people who live their lives in sedentary ways that were unheard of in previous generations.

(Rowe, 2004, p.2/3)

Whilst a minority of people are highly physically active (Roberts & Brodie, 1992), looking more widely than sport, recent PA trend data shows an increase in the proportion of adults who are in the least active group³ (Petersen et al, 2004). There is a general decline in PA from childhood, to adolescence, to adult life and this decline is greater for females (Van Mechelen et al, 2000). The UK population is increasingly

¹ For example see Caborn (2007), Great Britain Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (2002), HC Deb 30 October 1992 c1250, HC Deb November 1990 c399-405.

² Sport England is one of the UK quasi-governmental Sport Councils.

³ This group complete less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week. This is consistent for both genders and all age groups (Petersen et al, 2004). Only 37% of men and 24% of women meet the current Government guidelines for physical activity (see footnote 6) (British Heart Foundation, 2006).

sedentary and low sport participation levels are common (Curtis, 2006)⁴. The social and economic costs of sedentary behaviour have become key public policy concerns.

Obesity levels in England are increasing year-on-year and are tracking those in the USA, rates of coronary heart disease although decreasing remain high, Type II Diabetes is on the increase with prevalence growing amongst younger populations and osteoporosis is becoming increasingly prevalent particularly amongst older women.

(Rowe, 2004, p.3)

Sport and PA have been linked with a reduction in the noted health risks (Department of Health, 2004; Rowe et al, 2004a; Tunstall-Pedoe et al, 1999).⁵ Concerned by these low levels, in 2002 the UK Government set out ambitious targets to increase participation in sport and PA among the population, which included the following:

To encourage a mass participation culture (with as much emphasis on physical activity as competitive sport). A benchmark for this could be Finland, which has very high quality and quantity of participation, particularly among older people. Our target is for 70% (currently ~30%) of the population to be reasonably active (for example 30 minutes of moderate exercise five times a week) by 2020.⁶

(DCMS, 2002, p.15)

In fact over the last 30 plus years policy makers and providers have introduced a number of initiatives and campaigns in an attempt to engender adult sport participation and the current targets will be followed by a similar framework of support. A 40% target increase in participation across 18 years is particularly challenging. Whilst this is an increase of 1% per year, it will need to reverse a decline in participation to get the current non-participant sedentary population active, including older age groups (Rowe et al, 2004b). A long term cultural change will be required if this widening of participation is to be achieved and then maintained.

⁴ In addition to a decline in sport and PA participation, time squeeze, decline in physically demanding jobs, labour saving devices, and an increase in car use all contribute to a more sedentary lifestyle (Blair, 2006).

⁵ Physical activity is linked with a reduction in the risk of obesity, coronary heart disease, stroke, Type II Diabetes, osteoporosis, some cancers and high blood pressure. There is also evidence that regular physical activity confers psychological benefits, particularly among those who are suffering from mild depression (see Rowe et al, 2004a).

⁶ The Government recommendation that adults should participate in a minimum of 30 minutes of at least moderate intensity activity (such as brisk walking, cycling or climbing the stairs) on 5 or more days a week has been cited since 1996 and was restated by the Chief Medical Officer in 2004 (British Heart Foundation, 2006).

1.2 STUDY PURPOSE

With this context in mind I was curious to know more about the reasons for participation and non-participation. Whilst participation levels are low, there have been changes in the levels of participation in particular activities. I wanted to explore the perception and popularity of team and partner sports and other types of physical and recreation activities. A massive decline in sport participation at post school age is clearly still evident (UK SPORT, 1999; Wolfenden, 1960) and whilst higher education appears to delay this (Coalter, 1999), examining participation beyond this into middle age is critical to understanding life long participation. I wanted to examine the value and perception of sport participation in individuals' lives and the desire to be active, in order to try and understand this participation behaviour.

Therefore the overall aim of this thesis was to examine how and why people participate in sport. I looked at why people get involved in, continue with, or disengage from sport participation, examining this across their lifetime, using the concept of self-identity and its theory as a possible explanation. I completed an in depth qualitative study which looked retrospectively at the sport involvement history of 16 early middle aged⁷ UK adults. Six were currently active in sport and PA, five in PA only, and five considered themselves to be non-participants. This study was based on my belief that in order to understand sport participation, we must listen carefully to the experiences recounted by our respondents and look to understand the

⁷ The participants were between 38-43 years of age (with one exception, a 35 year old) and were therefore making a transition into midlife (Levinson et al, 1978). I acknowledge that middle aged and midlife are contested terms. I have used early middle age to refer to this age group as supported by Hunt et al. (2001), Kleiber (1999) and Levinson et al. (1978). The entire period of middle age is more extensive, for example Partington et al. (2005) suggest 35-55 years, Thompson et al. (2002) 40-54 years and Hunt et al. (2001) 39-60 years. I acknowledge that there is now a move to increase the initial age considered as midlife, for example the North East Physical Activity Forum and North East Public Health Observatory (2007) in England, have commenced project work with middle aged adults from 45-65 years of age, but they also label those who are 50 plus as older adults, therefore suggesting that there is an overlap between middle and older age, or that middle age lasts for only 5 years. Some authors break down middle age into stages (see for example Hunt et al, 2001; Scott-Porter, 2002) and typically early middle age they suggest, starts around 40 years. Likewise Levinson et al. (1978) suggests that a midlife transition takes place, usually starting around 40/41 years and taking about 5 years to complete. I was interested in the move into midlife and focusing on a smaller spread of ages, as there has been no specific exploration of this transition in sport and physical activity, in previous literature. Additionally when I started the study I intended to focus more on the impact of youth Physical Education experiences and the group below 43 years of age, at the time of interview had received a sport and physical activity based curriculum in their childhood, rather than other types of training.

way in which they construct sport participation as part of their lived world. Critically the study goes against the traditions of other research in this field⁸ by:

- 1.) including the individual's own definition and meaning of sport in the research;
- 2.) focusing on the individual's perspectives on their own sport experiences
- 3.) focusing on the individual rather than social groups.

I have argued that there is sufficient literature examining the social and structural factors that are purported to enable or constrain particular groups from participating in sport. Research that focuses on the individual's experience, beliefs and attitudes towards sport is still an emerging field and this study looked to add to this area, representing a departure from the main stream approach to studying sport participation.

Participation in sport in the UK has been characterised by low levels and this is particularly evident when comparisons are drawn with other European countries.⁹ During the 1980s there were broad increases in adult sport participation (GHS, 1987-1996 in Gratton & Tice, 1994). However, there was a drop off in participation in more physically vigorous, competitive and team sports. This increase levelled off in the early 1990s, when two out of three adults were taking part on a regular basis (including walking).¹⁰ However, when walking was excluded only 1 in 3 were participating on a regular basis. Since then, surveys show a broad decline in participation (DCMS, 2002; Sport England, 2006a, 2007a)¹¹¹². Now only 21% of the adult population take part in sport and active recreation regularly (Sport England,

⁸ See the later section on current literature for an overview of common approaches and footnote 18 for a list of typical survey approaches.

⁹ The UK has similar participation patterns to Ireland and the Netherlands, whilst Finland and Sweden stand out as having significantly higher levels of general participation and within intensive participation categories. The findings show a north/south divide across Europe and whilst the UK has higher participation rates than some of the southern European countries, the countries most similar to the UK (culture and weather) have higher levels of participation. Whilst in the UK dramatic drops in participation occur between the ages of 16-19 and 20-24 years of age, in other countries there is a lesser decline (UK SPORT, 1999).

¹⁰ The influence of one trend (keep fit/aerobics activity) on this overall increase should be noted. Between 1987 and 1990 regular participation (excluding walking) by women grew by five percent compared with only a one percent increase amongst men. Sixteen percent of women took part regularly in keep fit/aerobics in 1990 compared with 12% in 1987 (Gratton & Tice, 1994).

¹¹ Data shows a gradual decline when participation in one activity in the 4 weeks before interview, is compared over time. Including walking the levels were; 1987 - 61%, 1990 - 65%, 1993 - 64%, 1996 - 64%, 2002 - 59%; excluding walking they were 1987 - 45%, 1990 - 48%, 1993 - 47%, 1996 - 46%, 2002 - 43% (DCMS, 2002).

¹² It can be difficult to get a clear picture of sport participation levels and trends. Research evidence has been characterised by a mixture of questions, methods and changes in design which make comparison over time difficult. (Coalter, 1999; Foster et al, 2005; Sport England, 2005a).

2006a, p.1). Looking at young people's participation, research suggests that there have also been increases, since the mid-1980s (Roberts, 1996ab). In 2007 ninety three percent of children participated in an active sport in the last four weeks, out of school lessons. However, regular participation in this instance could represent less than one occurrence per month. Nonetheless, committed and regular participants are higher in number than at the adult stage, with thirty five percent of secondary aged pupils playing sport out of school lessons on five or more days a week (Roberts, 1996a, p.51). Still, among 16-19 year olds there has been a decline in participation (GHS, 1987-1996 in Gratton & Tice, 1994).

The surveys of adult participation also reveal that participation is socially patterned. A greater proportion of men participate than women, whilst those from the higher socio-economic groups and those describing themselves as white are more likely to participate than other groups (Gratton & Tice, 1994; Rowe et al, 2004b). There is some evidence of a slight narrowing of the gender gap and some lessening of the constraining impact of ageing, but there is no evidence to show any widening of participation to include more people with low incomes, of minority ethnic groups and of disability (Rowe et al, 2004b). Those who stay in education after the minimum school leaving age have higher rates of participation and are more likely to continue participation as they grow older (Coalter et al, 1994; Coalter, 2004). Despite general increases in participation among older age groups between 1987 and 1993, participation declines with age. Whilst 80% of young people (6-16) take part in at least one sport on a regular basis, only 45% of adults (over 16) do so (DCMS, 2002).¹³ So, whilst participation has remained 'broadly static' (Rowe, 2004), the participation base has also remained broadly similar.

Despite this picture of overall decline the outlook may not be as bleak as it first appears. Coalter (1999) and Roberts (1996ab) have both suggested that the perception that sports participation levels have declined may be a misinterpretation. Coalter in a re-analysis of the General Household Survey data (1977, 1980, 1983, 1986, 1987) suggests that there has been an under-estimation of overall activity

¹³ Of those in their 40s (the age of the subjects of this study), only one in two adults takes part in sport on a regular basis (Sport England/UK SPORT, 2001).

levels.¹⁴ His re-analysis also reveals hidden patterns from the sport participation data. Whilst there has been a decline in participation in some activities, this has been offset by increases in others. This analysis shows a shift in patterns of sport participation, in the UK. There has been a decline in the popularity of team and partner sports¹⁵ (the types of activities experienced at school), whilst physical activities, by way of ‘non-competitive, individual, flexible, fitness and lifestyle¹⁶ oriented activities’ (Coalter, 1999, p.26), requiring relatively low skill levels, particularly swimming, keep-fit, cycling and weights have growing participation rates (Coalter, 1999, 2004).¹⁷ The indoor sports facility is the most popular location for activity, with swimming and keep-fit/yoga being the most popular activities in such a location.

For many years the GHS data produced by OPCS (1977-1987) (see Gratton and Tice, 1994) offered the only overall picture of participation. With other data collected in the past few years there is substantiation for the popularity of individual health and fitness orientated activities as Coalter (1999) highlighted, but despite this it remains the case that overall levels and the regularity and quality of participation have remained low particularly in comparison to the rest of Europe (Sport England, 2006a; UK Sport, 1999). Even when measuring those who participate in sport as little as 12 times a year, the UK has only 46% of its population fulfilling this, compared to Sweden at 70%, and Finland at 80% (UK SPORT, 1999). In contrast to Coalter’s

¹⁴ This was due to a change in questioning method between surveys in 1977, 1980, 1983 and those from 1987 onwards. Coalter (1999) suggests that the underestimation may be substantial, particularly for non-competitive recreational activities such as cycling, walking and keep-fit.

¹⁵ These activities are often viewed as ‘mainstream’ or ‘traditional’ sport compared to individual, fitness and recreative activities (Coalter, 2004; Rowe et al, 2004b; UK SPORT, 1999). The Council of Europe (1993) have defined sport very widely, as “Sport means all forms of physical activity which, through casual participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels”. However, many agencies and researchers still focus on a notion of mainstream sport and other activities. ‘Physical activity’ and ‘active recreation’ cover a broader range of activities (DCMS, 2002). Whilst the definition of sport used by Sport England is wide and inclusive, analysis of sport tends to focus firstly on the traditional team and ball games and then to move onto individual, fitness, and recreation. There is a distinction between organised and competitive and casual and informal, with the former regarded as the mainstream.

¹⁶ Lifestyle activities are among the most popular for regular participation. Cycling, keep fit and weights are the only activities (excluding walking) completed at least twice a week on average (Coalter, 2004). Sport England (2006a) shows that the most common active sport participated in by adults during the past 12 months was swimming or diving (31%) followed by health, fitness, gym or conditioning activities (20%).

¹⁷ Walking, swimming, keep-fit/yoga, cycling, weight training, running and golf had the highest rates of participation for those participating at least once in the past 12 months (Sport England, 2002). These are all activities that can be participated in on an individual basis. (British Heart Foundation, 2006).

(1999) and Roberts' (1996ab) more positive outlook, Sport England now openly states that sport participation levels have remained largely unchanged for the past 30 years, though this generalisation does mask changes in particular activity levels. There are pockets of high and regular activity by a minority of committed participants, and there have been overall increases in participation in, physical and recreation activities, but declines in mainstream sport. Regular participation at a level which would accrue health benefits is low, as 50.6% of adults in England (20.6 million) did not take part in any moderate intensity sport and active recreation of 30 minutes duration in the last month, and another 29% of adults (11.5 million) have only completed 30 minutes exercise on between 1-11 days in the last month (Sport England, 2006a).

However, despite the low levels of participation, research does reveal some desire to participate among non-participants (Sports Council and HEA, 1992). This survey also revealed that sport and exercise were valued for health and fitness. In fact it has been suggested that many people in the UK population (one third to two thirds) are 'chronic contemplators' who think about doing more PA but who do 'not get...around to it' (Foster et al, 2005, p.30).

1.3 PREVIOUS LITERATURE

1.3.1 Survey approaches

Since the 1990s a number of key sport participation surveys have been carried out with the UK population, funded by the Sports Councils and to a lesser extent the Health Education Authorities¹⁸ (for a summary of quantitative studies see appendix 1 of Foster et al. (2005, p.55-64). These studies provide the descriptive picture that I have elaborated above. The UK surveys identify trends of, and possible influences on sport participation. There are however, limitations, as many of the studies present variables (typically age and gender) and suggest participation relationships, on the

¹⁸ See for example on young people, and sport (Kremer et al, 1997; Mason, 1995; Sport England, 2002b, 2000a); and physical activity (Armstrong, 1994, 2002; Sallis et al. 2000; Sleep and Warburton, 1996); on adults, and sport (Coalter, 1999; GHS, 1973-97 in Gratton & Tice, 1994; Sport England/UK Sport, 2001; Sport England, 2006a; Sport England, 2007a;) and physical activity (Mullineaux, 2001; The Sports Council and HEA, 1992).

basis of speculation, rather than evidence. In contrast some of the authors have reanalysed national data (Coalter, 1999; Mullineaux, 2001) and others have tested multiple variables identified from previous work (Kremer, 1997; Sallis, 2000). The UK studies identified a number of factors that influence sport participation. These factors have been further explored in academic studies in the UK and other countries; such as age (Rudman, 1989; Sallis, 2000; Sports Council & HEA, 1992), availability of sport activities and facilities (Biddle, 2002; Collins, 2003; Gratton et al, 1999), class (Collins, 2003; Mullineaux, 2001), education (Coalter, 1999; Roberts & Brodie, 1992), ethnicity (Hall et al, 2002; Sport England, 2000b), gender (Hall et al, 2002; Kay, 2004; Scully & Clarke, 1997), health and disability (Collins, 2003) life events (Hedges, 1986), life stages (Hendry et al, 1993; Kelly, 1983, Raymore, 1995; Shepherd, 1995), socio-economic status (Collins, 2003; Crespo et al, 1999), social exclusion (Collins, 2003), time squeeze (Coalter, 1999), personal psychology (Collins, 2003; Sallis 2000), previous participation (Hendry et al, 1993; Roberts & Brodie, 1992; Sallis, 2000) and socialisation (Greendorfer, 1992). Coalter (1999) suggests in summary that participation at adult level is influenced by multiple factors; class, occupation, education, increased awareness of health and fitness issues and pressure to achieve the 'look', lifestyle, consumption choices and time. However, even in this case the understanding of the issues is largely correlational, with a lack of explanation for any effect (Coalter, 2004).

Participation is a complex behaviour, determined by many factors which some would suggest need to be examined concurrently (Sallis, 2000) and this creates a problem for the existing literature. There has been little, if any attempt to examine the whole range of factors that influence participation together. On examining many of the studies each of the authors draw on work of others to raise the influence of other factors, but there have been few attempts to try and integrate these studies.

The large scale research on sport participation, whilst valuable has historically adopted a positivistic approach and the implications of using these roots are rarely acknowledged. This research is quantitative and mechanistic characterised by cross-sectional survey data with pre-determined questions, researching particular social

groups and taking a structural approach to explaining any trends.¹⁹ The studies focus on describing participation by types, amounts and levels. This is then cross-analysed by a range of social factors. Whilst the scale of the surveys are extensive, the scope is limited and restricted by the chosen method, and little attention is paid to individual's feelings and views on the sport experience. As a result, it is hard to explain trends or understand participation. The studies have often focused on constraints to participation, with most surveys including questions on strengths of barriers in order to encourage removal of them (Collins, 2003; Foster et al, 2005). There is a danger that this overshadows exploring why people participate.²⁰ The social variables identified provide a very useful starting point, but this is not sufficient to understand individual sport participation behaviour.

I believe the emphasis on aggregated data has masked the subjective experience of individuals who have been either attracted to or repelled by sport. This is not a new criticism, as Theberge (1984) considered this problem, suggesting that whilst there was a plethora of information and statistics on sport participation, it did little to explain sport participation. Twenty years later, whilst research has offered a richer explanation, there is still a lack of any full explanation covering a full range of potential determinants (Foster et al, 2005). At the time (1984), Theberge suggested that there were two main approaches to examining sport participation which are a focus on individual characteristics (psychological and social psychological), with an over-emphasis on voluntarism; or a focus on socialisation into sport roles, with an overemphasis on social determinism. At the time of her writing social stratification literature was developing and Theberge (1984) acknowledged that some of this was useful (for example see Dawson, 1986; Donnelly, 1982; Hollands & Gruneau, 1979). However, in her view explanations were 'varied or wanting' and when social factor explanations of participation trends are reviewed this still appears to be the case (see chapter 2).

¹⁹ Critically the large participation studies are constrained by the interests and approaches of those who fund the research. Many of these studies are designed to suit agendas, to justify policy or targets, or offer positive self-reflection for organisations.

²⁰ This focus is understandable as the Sports Councils wish to intervene and remove barriers to participation where possible, but it masks participation despite constraint and the importance of enablers and empowering factors, as identified in academic work (for example see Kay & Jackson, 1991; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997).

1.3.2 Alternative approaches

Harland et al. (nd) (see Collins, 2003, p.245)²¹ looked across survey data and suggested that whilst social factors have an influence on sport participation, attitudes may be critical. For example whether an activity is of relevance, has a suitable image and is interesting may impact on participation. There are other studies that explore sports experience, with a focus on the individual's explanation and personal views (Kosonen, 1992; Messner, 1992; Sparkes, 1999; Tsang, 2000 are all examples). A more detailed understanding of the experience itself can be gained from these studies, examining the meaning and value attached to the activity and exploring whether individuals associate or identify with the activity. For example Coakley and White (1992) in a study of young people discussed the issues of definitions and meaning of sport and their impact on participation, while they noted that the young people's concerns are focused on self-identity and 'growing up'. At the same time they identified a variety of material and cultural constraints to participation. Porterfield considered the importance of 'history, culture and personal experiences' (1999, p.37) and Thomsson (1999) in a women only study, pointed to the restriction of the women's predominant role as carer in discouraging participation, but highlighted contradictory tensions with perceptions of the importance of exercise for health.

This research points to the importance of personal meaning of sport vis-à-vis participation. Studies that demonstrated social factors influencing participation, also suggest that the factors may have an influence only if the individual feels constrained by them, and there are suggestions in some studies that people are able to negotiate some constraints if they value the activity (Coakley & White, 1992; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; James, 2000; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997; Thomsson, 1999). Much research makes the assumption that the activity is positively valued and desirable and that where individuals are constrained they have to adjust to the imposition of these factors. With this view there is a danger of viewing people as victims of their circumstances. Samdahl and Jekubovich (1997) provided a challenge to this common view, when they showed participants action as a two way process of balance and

²¹ Harland et al (nd) is an unpublished report for the Department of National Heritage which I could not access.

negotiation, more evident of personal agency. Likewise the individual focused studies revealed that views and feelings on ‘value, meaning and context’ of participation might be as critical in understanding participation behaviour. The research teams of larger studies suggested that a focus on these factors will be too difficult to measure, so a simpler approach is used (Janssens et al, 2002; UK SPORT, 1999). This continual avoidance is realised in the replication of similar types of research. Whilst the previous studies have shown many consistently identified factors influencing participation, what seems to be important are the individual’s experience and the context in which they experience sport (Coakley & White, 1992). This study seeks to provide a focus on the individual and joins research carried out in different discipline areas which focus on the individual’s sport experiences. In doing this I seek to contribute to wider understanding, as the findings may have resonance for other people and in comparison to other studies.

1.3.3 Explanations of sport participation.

Although few sport participation surveys have been based on any theoretical framework²², other authors have made attempts to conceptualise participation behaviour which have focused on socialisation, motivation, antecedents and more latterly identity (see Coakley & Donnelly, 1999 for an overview). Once again, this work is often diverse, however despite the variety of approaches the interpretations generally focus on constraints and enablers to participation (as Collins, 2003 shows). Within leisure studies, in particular, the constraints and enablers research has developed into a conceptual framework for explaining participation or non-participation in itself (Collins, 2003; Crawford et al, 1991).

Largely the explanations can be split into voluntaristic and deterministic views of participation. Theberge (1984) argued that there is a need to reconcile these two, because of issues with the assumption base of both perspectives. She extolled researchers to move beyond the limitations of each perspective. Whilst Theberge’s

²² However, recent research from Sport England reflects a more sophisticated use of research methods but still does not explain any basis from theory (e.g. Sport England Market Segmentation (Sport England, 2007b) however some qualitative research on understanding participation does apply theoretical models (Sport England, 2006 b,c,d).

call to take on this research approach dates back almost 20 years, the take up has been limited. It is the intention that this study should bridge the gap.

After critiques of socialisation research (Fishwick & Greendorfer, 1987; Frey & Eitzen, 1991; Greendorfer and Bruce, 1991; Stevenson, 1980; Theberge, 1984) a particular range of studies which focused on self-identity and sport emerged (Tsang, 2000; Stevenson, 2002 among others). In my original thinking for this study I had set out to consider whether the concept of self-identity could help me understand the questions I had about sport participation. I had used the identity concept for research completed on leisure behaviour associated with membership of the Girl Guide Association (King & Nichols, 2000; Nichols & King, 1997) and there it had offered a link between meaning and image of the activity, the sense of self and decisions made regarding the particular leisure participation. A number of research studies highlighted the importance of self-identity and the individual's subjective perceptions of experiences in explaining sport participation (in particular Coakley & White, 1992; Hendry et al, 1993; Kremer, 1997; Roberts, 1997 provided an insight for me). For example, from Coakley and White (1992), I became aware that whether young people participated in sport depended on how they viewed sport and themselves in relation to it, depending on whether the image of sport was consistent with their view of themselves. Sport participation was influenced by identity-based decisions but was also subject to a whole range of influences.

Sport participation in the lives of young people seems to occur when they decide it will help them extend control over their lives, present themselves to the rest of the world as a competent person, and reaffirm the way they think about themselves. Sport participation patterns shift over time depending on opportunities, constraints, social relationships, memories of the past, and changes in the lives and self-conceptions of young men and women.

(Coakley & White, 1992, p.84/5)

On the basis of this study I believed that sport participation decisions may be influenced by choices about self identity, but that the effect of social and economic structures cannot be ignored.

The importance of self identity identified in Coakley and White (1992) was looked at with greater focus in a range of research. Literature on becoming an athlete (Coakley,

1999; Stevenson, 2002); questioning whether sport can form an identity base, development of adolescent identities (Curtis & McTeer, 1999; Roberts, 1997, 1999); and the role of sport and leisure activities in affirming identities (Haggard & Williams, 1992) has been insightful to this study. A number of biographically related studies of sport identity experiences and change were also critical in informing my thinking; Tsang's (2000) review of elite rowers experiences, Kosonen's (1992) view of her own sport experiences, Healey's (1991) study of first memories and stories of sport, some of Sparkes' work (1999, 2000) on identity making through stories, and a review of Devís-Devís & Sparke's (1999) experiences of critical identity crisis. Importantly the research is useful in exploring how sport may play a role in meeting or resisting social expectations and telling others about who the individual is (Tsang, 2000). Considering whether there is any sense of sport identity, whether a sense of identity with sport is fixed at an early age and whether identity can change over time, are all critical questions when trying to explain sport participation.

Overall, my conclusion is that the academic contribution on sport participation is rather disparate, with numerous approaches. The literature provides no overall explanation of sport participation and the explanations are varied with little integration with other work. Those who try to explain participation tend to be individual authors and there are no experts on sport participation. However, the questions to be addressed and the way in which they need to be investigated are very difficult, especially if one wishes to look at these on a large scale (as a public body would be under pressure to do so, in order to generalise). There remains a critical need to understand why participation changes, whilst there is a general concern about the low level of participation. If research continues to focus on structural factors only, the reasons for individual participation levels and changes may never be established. It is the aim of this study to focus on the individual's experiences and to consider the importance of self identity within sport participation.

1.4. PERSONAL RATIONALE FOR STUDY

Alongside an academic rationale, my reasons for wanting to undertake this research are rooted in my own experiences of sport and those of significant others. For as long as I can remember I had a passion for sport and physical activity, however I had a

varied experience in sport during my youth and 20s, excelling at some and feeling an outsider to others. My decision to study for an MA in Leisure Management (specialising in Sport Management) grew out of my passion for sport, but this stage of my life proved critical to the shaping of my research ideas. Firstly, my decision to study leisure and sport management involved me explaining the value of the provision to others and considering the nature of the activities. Secondly, I began to reflect on sports behaviour from a theoretical and policy perspective. I began to think about sport provision targets and the lack of success in increasing and widening participation. I could find little answer for this in the classes I took and my reading. I began to think ‘what does sport mean to others’, ‘what is included in sport by providers’, ‘why are people turned on or off sport’? I was frustrated that my academic study was limited to management, with a provision focus and I wanted to go beyond this and deeper than my study of consumer behaviour would let me. There was one particular module on issues and trends in leisure and this brought me to social science material. Until taking this module and then developing a proposal for this PhD I had limited knowledge of sociological theory, although my academic background did afford some exploration of the social sciences in one half of my undergraduate degree (my first degree is in Modern History and Politics). On this management course I began writing critiques of provision and policy and it was at this stage that I realised that I wanted to look at the behaviour of those, these were directed towards. I wanted to understand how and why they reacted to sport provision.

1.5 RESEARCH AIMS

My study was carried out with the overall aim of addressing the following research question:

Can we explain patterns and developments of current participation in sport and physical activity by examining the development of an individual’s perceptions of the activity and sense of sporting identity over their lives?

With this question in mind there are several aims which form the heart of this thesis:

- 1.) Evaluate historical and current sport participation experiences and senses of sport self-identity in adult life, through individuals’ sport histories.

My research involved exploring experiences of sport participation in a middle-aged group of people, an under-researched group²³. I looked at keen participants, those who sometimes participate and some who rarely participate. Four key questions were investigated, linked to this aim. First, how and what decisions did the individuals make with regard to sport participation, secondly how they felt about these experiences? Third I explored whether sport had a role in shaping their sense of self, whether sport was relevant to this self and whether this changed over time? In doing this I looked at the image, relevance and value of participation in the activity which may determine whether they associate with this. Lastly I wanted respondents to look back at experiences across their life span, so that I could see whether there is a sense of biography or 'career' linked to these sport experiences? By looking at the senses of sport self-identity I also looked to see whether chosen identity concepts were useful for exploring these findings. Key to this approach was a move beyond looking at explaining sport participation by focusing on a mechanistic measurement of variables. I wished to look holistically at multiple factors identified by the individuals.

2.) To identify development of the individuals' meanings of sport.

I argue, on the basis of review of other empirical sport participation research, that researcher derived, narrow and conventional definitions of sport and structured categories of activities have been used to label the participation activities prior to investigation.²⁴ Many of these lists focus on traditional senses of sport as team and

²³ Little is known about the sports experiences of middle aged people in the UK. Besides from research on the participation of the general population, other work focuses on young and older people. At the time when these individuals were at school, Physical Education had become a recognised subject (Kirk, 1998) with a similar curriculum across schools and established similarities in the patterns of delivery and looking at this age group allowed for youth sport effects to be considered. Additionally, initial data collection did seem to suggest that middle age, and in particular 'Turning 40' might be perceived to be a significant life event or transition point in relation to sport attitudes, behaviour and identity.

²⁴ The main surveys are clearly prompt based (GHS, 1977-1987 in Gratton & Tice, 1994; Sport England, 2006a, 2007a; The Sports Council and HEA, 1990) and lists are based on activities of historical or popular standing (UK SPORT, 1999). There is no exploration of the nature and purpose of the activity, as participation for leisure, play, fitness for example. It is acknowledged that some have used long lists that have encompassed fitness type and outdoor activities as well as more traditional team games (Sport England, 2000) However, even in these cases 'keep fit, yoga and dance' are grouped together. More recent reports state that a wide definition of sport will be used and then still use categories. The need for pre-coded multiple choice questions in research on this

individual competitive pursuits. I aimed to gain an 'insider perspective' (Ribbens, 1994, p.34) and left the definition of sport open to the participants, so that any connotations of sports boundaries were explored. Coalter (2004 p.85) notes that "...there is a need to address the issue of 'life-time sports' and, almost certainly, re-define aspects of 'sport'" if the participation base is to be widened. I wanted to see the true sense of sports, to see whether there was a distinction between traditional and other sports. As the definition of sport used in policy statements (Council of Europe, 1993) has widened I wondered if the individuals' definitions of sport would reflect this. The review of meanings explores feelings and views of sport and experiences.

- 3.) To evaluate the long-term impact of the perception of youth sports experience on later sport participation and identity, development.

A number of authors have suggested that early experiences of sport, in particular physical education have a lasting influence on adult participation (the 'school sports hypothesis') (Curtis & McTeer, 1999; Hendry et al, 1993; Malina, 1996; Mason, 1995; Roberts & Brodie, 1992; Scott & Willits, 1998). This view has been given added weight by World Health Organisation statements, such as 'Patterns of physical activity acquired during childhood and adolescence are more likely to be maintained throughout the lifespan...' (World Health Organisation, 2003, p.5). This so called 'post school drop out' was an identified concern as far back as 1960 (Wolfenden, 1960) and is the basis for a focus on engendering life long participation (LLP) in sport, and the primary focus on youth intervention taken in much modern sport development work. Most reference to LLP tends to be speculative on any possible links between child and adult participation (a problem identified by Dishman, 1989; Vanreusel et al, 1997). Several authors suggest that unless experiences in childhood have been positive, participation discontinues (Curtis & McTeer, 1999; Malina, 1996; Roberts & Brodie, 1992; Scott & Willits, 1998).

scale is understood, but this design constrains any attempt to explain the meaning of sport activities to the respondents. However, Sport England has completed qualitative work more recently on the participation of the retired, lone parents and adolescent girls (Sport England, 2006 b, c, d).

Despite this lack of evidence, much has been made of this view, so I aimed to re-visit this childhood influence notion. I was depressed by the idea that someone who had a negative experience of sport at an early age, was unlikely to participate again. At an early stage in my research, a key study came to my attention, and this in contrast to the commonly held view suggested that adults may change their sport participation patterns later in life (Hedges, 1986). I wanted to explore this further, to consider how and why adults might change their participation patterns. In order to do this I looked at the way these individuals view past experience of sport and explored whether their current sport experience appear to be determined by the past? I examined whether any sense of sport identity is fixed in childhood? I paid close attention where individuals have taken up new sports in adult life and considered how and why this had happened and looked at their sense of self in relation to the new and any previous activity.

4.) To consider structural, cultural and ideological impacts on sport participation.

Whilst I aimed to focus on the individual's experiences and meanings of sport I also looked at the impact of structure, culture and ideology. Constraints and enablers to participation have been identified in leisure work (Crawford et al, 1991; Raymore, 2002; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997; Shaw, 1994). and from sport participation studies (such as Alexandris & Carroll, 1997; Alexandris et al, 2002; Coalter, 1993; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2000, 2003; Woodward et al, 1989 among others). Whilst it was not my intention for this study to become a review of constraining and enabling factors, I wished to explore what enables participation and focused on key elements that have an impact on participation. By taking the perspective of participation, the relationship between these factors, particularly culture, ideology, and value and meaning of the activity remains the focus.

5.) To consider the impact of life stages, transitions and events on participation and as 'turning points' in the construction/reconstruction of sport identity in adult life.

In attempting to understand changes in lifelong participation I investigated the extent to which life transitions, such as relationship change or movement between life

stages impacted on participation and their sense of self related to this? Some research suggests that early formed identities are more resistant to change (Curtis & McTeer, 1999; Rainsborough, 1999). I examined whether life stage transition was a ‘turning point’ where participation change occurred (Denzin, 1989a; Robin, 1993). I take a sociological and developmental psychological perspective on this change (Kelly, 1983, Levinson et al, 1987, 1996) which I expand on in the next chapter.

1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is organised in the following way. In this *Chapter One* I set out the research problem and accompanying research questions and laid the ground for investigation of sport and physical activity participation across an individuals life and as they enter mid life. I introduce the issues raised by previous literature and present a personal rationale for the study. In *Chapter Two* I discuss the previous research on understandings and explanations of sport participation. However, I argue that the relationship between individuals and society needs to be considered, encompassing a more holistic approach. *Chapter Three* is where I explain the methodological principles guiding this research and explain the methods used for data collection and analysis.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present the findings of the research. In *Chapter Four* I discuss the meanings, definition and importance of sport and physical activity to the individuals who participated in the study. *Chapter Five* explains how the meanings presented in Chapter Four are at the centre of sport participation decision making, by exploring understanding of the ideologies associated with sport persons and showing how these meanings have impacted on the attractiveness of identity choices. I explore how the attractiveness of sport and other associated identities vary across time and in *Chapter 6* I take this further by developing a discussion of the experiences and issues of involvement in sport and physical activity at this time of transition to midlife. I pay particular attention to the relevance of sport in conflict, and in concert, with concerns about caring and responsibility. *Chapter 7* is the concluding chapter where I draw out the main conclusions of the study and consider the implications of these. I consider the usefulness of the research and outline further areas for research into sport and physical activity participation in midlife.

CHAPTER 2

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Sport participation has been studied within a wide range of disciplines including anthropology, cultural studies, economics, education, geography, history, literature¹, marketing, philosophy, physiology, psychology and sociology. The greatest focus on sport as a social phenomenon is found in sport sociology.² Whilst a subject of growing academic focus, the largest scale research on sport participation has been carried out by sport practitioners, including policy makers, and development and planning professionals³. Literature on sport participation has been produced as guidance and promotion of sport and physical activity to the public⁴, and as guidelines for practitioners⁵. Other publications have been created by non-sport voluntary organisations such as the Scouts UK⁶, and the British Heart Foundation⁷.

¹ A popular literature exists which explores the author's or others personal sport experiences e.g. Myerson, J. (2005) 'Not a Games Person'. Yellow Jersey Press. This is accompanied by similar comment in the media and popular magazines e.g. 'Not the sporty type?' *Red*, June 2005.

² This is a relatively young discipline, which grew out of problems with the physical science focus. The physical science approach to sport has been equated with a focus on achievement, by developing physical and psychological potential, through coaching and training. In contrast sport sociology challenges this approach and criticises its positivist base, saying this does not provide a complete explanation of a person's chance of success in sport (Armour & Jones, 2000).

³ E.g. Sport England's 'Trend Tracking' (2007a, 2006a) and 'Understanding Participation' (2006b,c,d) research (<http://www.sportengland.org/index/getresources/research>)

⁴ E.g. Sport England's (2007c) 'Get fit, get healthy, get the sporting habit' programme, which includes roadshows, and electronic A-Z listings of sports and search guides to 'Finding the Sport for You' (http://www.sportengland.org/index/get_active.htm)

⁵ Examples include:

- Sport England (2007d), 'Promoting Sport Toolkit', an extranet set of guides on how to develop sport participation, broken down guidance for gender and age groups. This sets out very briefly 'what appeals to them' for the age group and 'what stops them taking part'

(<http://www.promotingsport.sportengland.org/HowtoGuides/Howtopromotesporttodifferentpeople/Howtopromotesporttomen31-55.pdf>)

- Amateur Rowing Association 2007, 'Rowing and Health. Change your world, one stroke at a time', a guidance report for health and physical activity promoters on the benefits of sport participation and participation profiles. This is an example of the link made between sport participation in adopting healthy lifestyles.

(<http://www.ararowing.org/Asp/uploadedfiles/File/RowingAndHealth/RowingAndHealth07.pdf>)

⁶E.g. Scouts UK (2007) offer young people the opportunity to learn about sport (Sports Enthusiast badge) and to participate (Physical Recreation and Street Sports Badges among others) through a

These organisations use sport as an activity but it is only one component of their programme or concerns. Lastly, a vast amount of media coverage is given to sport, on a daily basis to elite performance, but there are also semi-frequent articles on participation.⁸

There have been attempts to define, quantify and explain the benefits of, participation in sport. Less work has attempted to explain participation, but among this the greatest focus is on constraints (Collins, 2003). Dunning provides four views of why sport has been studied; as an 'end in itself', for 'improvement of human performance', to help people 'orientate themselves better in the complex and fluid social world' and 'helping to achieve political goals'(2002; p.15). Due to the widely and uncritically accepted value of sport most researchers desire to increase participation. Some have problematised sport participation and there is a clear contrast between those who wish to support performance and achievement, and others who examine sport as social practice. Some authors have found the idea that '...sport may not be good for everyone and equally available to all...' challenging, when considering the benefits they themselves have received from sport (Jones and Armour, 2000; p.xvi). However, equity and access have become issues of concern (Collins, 2003; Hylton & Totten, 2008).

Whilst there are reasons for studying sport participation, the research in this area has lacked credibility. The parent disciplines have often viewed the study as non-serious, meriting limited attention and this work has often sat on the fringes. The research base is multi-disciplinary and multi-paradigmatic and there has been vast disagreement about the best way to study sport. Indeed the 'war of paradigms' has been fully played out in sport studies (Dunning, 1992; p.221). Development of understanding has been constrained by the highly contested, fragmented and imperialist nature of research (Dunning, 2002), and by the lack of inter-disciplinary work or acknowledgements across sub-disciplines. There are some notable exceptions to this (Coalter, 1999; 2004; Green, 2002; Roberts, 1996b, 1997). At the

qualification (www.scoutbase.org.uk/library/hqdocs/badges), and provide fact sheets on participation (www.scoutbase.org.uk/hq/sponsorship/badges/fruitshoot-sc-stsp.pdf).

⁷ E.g. BHF (2006) 'Get Active for Your Heart'

(www.bhf.org.uk/keeping_your_heart_healthy/staying_active/get-active_for_your_heart.aspx)

⁸ E.g. *The Guardian*, 17 August 2007, 14 July 2007, and 6 June 2007, *The Telegraph* 26 October 2006

same time whilst having a strong empirical base, the research has lacked theoretical sophistication. The large scale research in this area has focused on ‘facts and observations’ and lacked conceptual and theoretical reflection. In contrast research which has stronger grounding in theory has been small scale and there is little sense of a ‘field of research’ on sport participation. However, gradually there has been an increase in theoretical considerations and encouragingly the research on sport participation has been applied, with large scale work driven by practice based researchers.⁹

Overall, there is a lack of integration across the breadth of approaches to sport participation research. Recently there has been greater interaction between academic and practice based researchers and much of the larger scale work conducted by the non-governmental sport organisations is completed in conjunction with or by academics.¹⁰ The sharing of knowledge between practice and academia is critical in this regard. However, notwithstanding the sharing of knowledge by the sport bodies, there is still a reluctance to do this academically, with much caricaturing of others work, rather than building on or from it.

This chapter considers the range of explanations of sport participation. Broadly speaking the explanations can be divided into three key areas, firstly psychological appraisal of expected outcomes, and motivators and inhibitors; secondly socialisation processes as of internalisation and outcomes, and thirdly identity and identity formation processes (Coakley, 2003; Horne et al, 2001; Kremer et al, 1997). In this chapter I will firstly consider definitions of sport and discuss the way it has been distinguished from physical activity, exercise and leisure. I then consider explanations of sport participation, **firstly** psychological explanations of sport

⁹ However, this research has focused on levels and patterns of participation and when looking at explanations have been limited to fairly basic survey responses. However, more recently Sport England’s research agenda has encompassed more complex considerations of possible sport participation explanations in the ‘Taking Part Survey 2007’ (Sport England, 2007a). None the less qualitative insights into understanding participation are growing slowly, with only two reports focused on single groups so far (15-19 year old, women and the recently retired have been in focus) (Sport England, 2006b,c,d).

¹⁰ E.g. SIRC at Sheffield Hallam became a collaborating Centre on the Economics of Sport, with Sport England in 2005 (see http://www.shu.ac.uk/research/sirc/rc_economics.html for details of this and other Sports Council research); among other collaborations are Coalter & Dowers (2006) (Stirling and Edinburgh Universities respectively, with SportScotland), and the Loughborough Partnership (2007) (a group of academics) with SportScotland.

participation, specifically considering the work directly related to participation and drop out. Research on motivation and personality, which have implications for participation, form large bodies of work in themselves and are not within the scope of my study (see Gill (2000) for an overview). In the **second** section on sport participation I consider socialisation explanations of participation, exploring the dominant structural and functionalist theories underpinning these. Within this section I consider the findings of the social factor studies related to age, gender and wider constraints which are relevant to this study, although I suggest they do not give sufficient insight. Based on a review of these findings I note how alternative approaches have grown to studying these factors. Therefore in the **third** section on sport participation explanations I discuss the alternative interpretive approach, explore in particular the impact of identity and meaning making, and relationships, and introduce interpretive explorations of age and gender.¹¹ In a **fourth** section on sport participation explanations I examine developmental perspectives, discussing studies which explore life long participation. I note that although interpretive and developmental approaches have developed our understanding of sport participation and meaning, they pay limited attention to the influence of the cultural-social-political-economic context. Therefore in the **fifth** sport participation explanation section I consider studies which have bridged the gap by considering the individual, but in the social-political context. At the end of each sport participation explanation section I review the strengths and weaknesses of the particular approach. From this critique I suggest in a final chapter section how my study might move further beyond this context by taking an open approach and more latterly drawing on Giddens (1979, 1984, 1987, 1992), Goffman (1971, 1972ab, 1952) and Gilligan (1993)¹². I finish with some of the theoretical concepts and concerns that underpin my study.

2.2 SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: DEFINITIONS

There have long been attempts to define sport and Loy's (1968) is most often cited in academic sources. Whilst subject to long debate, sport remains a highly contested

¹¹ As it so important to the study, much of the discussion of interpretive studies on age and gender related to sport participation is left for discussion in Chapters 6 and 7 where it can be discussed close to the study findings.

¹² It should be noted that some sources are later versions of these seminal works, which were originally written as follows: Giddens, 1992 (first edition, 1991); Goffman, 1971 (first edition, 1959), 1972a (first edition, 1961), 1972b (first edition, 1967); Gilligan (1993) (first edition, 1982).

and political term, with an absence of consensus within the literature, proving difficult to define to the satisfaction of all concerned (Roberts, 2003). As Meier noted 'There are few words in the English Language which have such a multiplicity of divergent meanings as the word sport' (1981, p.79). Sport has been defined in several ways. First, sport has been recognised by a focus on the nature and characteristics of the activity. Second a distinction is drawn between different activity categories; both within sports - traditional sports, lifestyle activities and new alternatives¹³, and in comparison to exercise, planned physical activities¹⁴ and leisure (both active and constructive). Thirdly different theoretical and practitioner perspectives have influenced approaches to defining sport. This latter point is important as whilst researchers frequently push the definition of sport aside, they are quick to label activity as 'sport' when they see it (Radford, 1998). I now consider these distinctions.

2.2.1 The nature and characteristics of sport

Several authors provide a history of sport (see Brailsford, 1992; Dunning and Sheard, 1979; Guttmann, 1978; Kew, 1997; Mason, 1988) and it is clear that sport has developed across time. There are clearly differences between the nature and purpose of folk games, athleticism, rational recreation, modern sport and new alternatives (Eichberg, 1984; Gruneau, 1983; Hargreaves 1986; Horne et al, 2001; Kew, 1997; Mangan, 1981). The clearest and most contentious distinction is between modern sport and its new and former alternatives.

Within modern sport a dominant culture is evident, 'one in which competition, extrinsic rewards, elitism based on skill, and specialisation are central components' (Beal, 2001, p.48). Roberts (2003) characterisation of what activities are deemed to be 'sport' fits with this.¹⁵ However, alternative notions of sport have surfaced as resistance to the traditional notion and Kew indeed argues that there are two models:

¹³ Alternatives are variously labelled as 'new or post modern sports' (Wheaton and Tomlinson, 2001; p.248); 'whiz', 'panic' and 'extreme' sports (Reinhart, 2000; p.505) and 'les sports californiens' by Ehrenburg (Guttmann, 2000, p.256).

¹⁴Exercise as planned physical activity does not include that which results indirectly from another process, for example work and domestic life.

¹⁵ The activities can be considered a sport if they: '...[are] games which are separated from the rest of life, or at any rate from the more 'serious' parts of life, by some combination of time, place and

The first is characterised as having an overwhelming concern with rankings, authoritarian relationships with coaches and players, highly competitive relationships between competitors, a constant search for improved performance, and an overwhelming interest in who won. Most people have been socialised into and accept this model of sport. The second model sees sport as 'inclusive, in balance with other aspects of life, educational in orientation, and co-operative and social in spirit.

(Kew, 1997; p.13, adapted from Fairchild, 1994)

This last binary is also echoed in Coakley's distinction between 'power and performance' and 'pleasure and participation' (2003, p.110-112). The two concepts differ in several ways. Firstly the mainstream notion of sport is one of competitive activity (Green et al, 2005). It is accepted that sports are social constructions as 'contrived or invented challenges set up to test the skills and ingenuities of the participants' (Kew, 1997; p.56). The question here is whether sport includes only competition against others or self challenge, or more contentiously non-competitive activities. There have been critiques of the narrowness of a definition confining sport to competitive activities only, questioning whether non-competitive and more freely structured activities might also be sport (Gibson, 1998: p.47). A further distinction is drawn between who organise sport, as controlled or informal activities, with the traditional sports being highly 'rationalised', 'bureaucratised', 'technologised' (Donnelly, 1988), rule, record and quantification bound compared to more informal, player controlled and more playful activities (Coakley, 2003). These alternative activities tend to emphasise open competition and equality, whereas traditional sports are seen to be elitist. Behind these different models of sport lie dichotomous ideologies. The athleticist ideology focused on using sport as a life lesson to instill values of self-discipline and moral values (Horne et al, 2001). Sport in this way is seen as a social institution for the transmitting of worthwhile social values. This focus on external benefits is developed further in a notion of elite sport for commercial gain. Clearly there is a distinction between a focus on internal or external goods from sport. Sport has been viewed as 'playful physical contests' (Guttman, 1978, p.54) for the purpose of enjoyment, but Gruneau (1983, p.44) criticised this notion of 'voluntary and free' sports. Sport can also be viewed as

rules,...require skill. One can improve one's performance by training and practice...are energetic...are competitive. Players compete against each other or against the clock or some other yardstick" (Roberts, 2003, p.4/5).

social practice for the realisation of internal goods skill development, testing of physical capabilities, exhilaration and achievement (Kew, 1997). The focus on performance or social benefits to the individual denotes different views of sport.

2.2.2 Different activities

The contrast in definitions of sport has led to debate about what activity can be considered a sport. Perhaps the broadest definition of sport activity is provided by the Council of Europe, which has been widely used by the UK Sports Councils;

Sport means all forms of physical activity, which through casual or organised participation, aims at improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships, or obtaining results in competition at all levels.

(Council of Europe, 1993)

There is some debate as to whether this definition should be so broad and inclusive of all types of physical activity. As Roberts notes ‘Sport is a contested concept. Its definition is political’ (2003, p.5). The concerns as to whether the definition should be so encompassing of physical activity, beyond traditional sport, centres on matters of semantics. Of greater importance are the provision implications, with recognition as a sport equalling greater status and funding than leisure activities. As Roberts further notes, part of the impetus for a wide definition of sport may come from groups on the periphery, as he says:

Public bodies and voluntary associations that represent groups of activities may have their own reasons for favouring broad definitions of sport. This widens the section of the population for whom they can claim to speak, and who, they may claim, benefit from the agencies’ spending and programmes.

(Roberts, 2003, p.5)

Whilst problematic for some, policy makers such as Sport England appear to now favour a wide heterogeneity of activities within sport, with diversity offering greater chance for individuals of all levels, to find an activity and intensity suitable for them (Coalter et al. 2000)¹⁶.

¹⁶ Coalter et al. describe a wide range of activity under sport: “...individual, partner and team sports; contact and non-contact sports, motor driven or perceptually dominated sports and those which place different emphases on strategy, chance and physical skills. Further, the nature and context of participation can range from the competitive, via an emphasis on self-development, to purely recreational activity)” (2000, p.8).

Whilst Coalter et al remind that sport is after all a 'collective noun' (2000, p.8) befitting this wide range of activities, the Council of Europe definition (1993) is also evidently different to narrower definitions of sport elsewhere in the world.¹⁷ These are well illustrated by Edwards as:

...activities having formally recorded histories and traditions, stressing physical exertion through competition within limits set in explicit and formal rules governing role and position relationships...having the goal...of defeating opposing groups.
(Edwards, 1973, p.57-58)

Likewise most studies distinguish between sport and other physical activities, placing the latter outside of a definition of sport. Green et al. (2005; p.40) distinguish between competitive game contests (sports such as football, rugby, basketball and badminton) and more recreationally-orientated physical activities (such as swimming, aerobics and cycling), often referred to as 'lifestyle activities' (Coalter, 1999). These latter activities tend to be non- or less competitive, can be participated in individually or in small groups, allow flexible participation (both in the time frame when they can be completed and without dependency on others participation) (Coalter, 1999; Green et al, 2005). Often these activities have a health and fitness orientation and reflecting on this Horne et al. comment on a "...rise in individualism in sport (in squash and running, for instance) constituting a new mode of consumption articulated around fashion and narcissism" (2001; p.65). Further to this, recent years have seen developments in alternative or countercultural activities, to sport. These include surfing, ultimate Frisbee, skateboarding, hot-dog skiing and, more recently, snowboarding, windsurfing, sport climbing, and mountain biking (Donnelly & Kidd, 2003). These activities which do not have widespread acceptance in mainstream notions of sport are characterised by flexible and informal structures, participant control, open participation and expressive play. What emerges from accounts of these activities is a notion that they represent post-modern, counter-culture alternatives to traditional sport (Reinhart, 2000).

...snowboarding, skateboarding, in-line skating, and mountain biking – windsurfing portrays a public image that emphasises individuality, freedom, hedonism, and an anticompetition ethos. These characteristics differentiate windsurfing from more

¹⁷ For example see the Australian Sports Commission (2006) definition.

traditional, rule-bound, competitive, and ‘masculinised’ sport sub-cultures, themselves marked by combative competition, aggression, courage and toughness (Wheaton and Tomlinson, 2001, p.428).

2.2.3 Defined from whose perspective?

Whilst sport has been debated among academics, as sport provision has developed in an organised form within the public, quasi-public, voluntary and private sector so to have definitions and classifications by the industry. Sport as an organised form developed through clubs, governing bodies and events and in the second half of the 20th century in a commercialised form. Traditional collectivist and new individualistic sports are offered across the industry, however the latter has spawned an entire industry based on health and fitness. There are a variety of ways of categorising sport and health and fitness activities in the industry¹⁸. Diversity in provision, perhaps also suggests diversity in definition. “Such tensions thrive on the striking lack of consolidation in sport. There is surprisingly little vertical or horizontal integration compared to other elements of the leisure industry” (Horne et al, 2001; p.272,). However, turning attention to the public, quasi-public and voluntary sector provision, ‘...traditionally important in the sporting world...’ (Henry & Theodoraki, 2000, p. 490) there is perhaps more common categorising of sport activities. Within sport development practice, there is perhaps more agreement, as the Council of Europe definition is widely used, however disagreement about the meaning of ‘sports development’ itself, suggest that the professional area’s definition is ‘ambiguous’ and ‘contested’ (Braham & Hylton, 2008, p.3). When the problems of providing an overall definition of sports development are examined, issues with a narrow focus on performance in competitive sport or wide senses of sport and physical activity become apparent.

Whilst the definition of sport held within sport development is wide, there are several indicators that the definition of sport in the popular domain may be much narrower. Media coverage of sport shows popular attention focusing on team sport and sporting excellence (Hunt et al, 2001, p.151). Whilst this may not mean that other activities

¹⁸ E.g. Leisure Tynedale (2007), Northumberland, UK provides a Summer Sports Development programme, including ‘fun and fitness to music’ which might fall under health and fitness programmes elsewhere.

would not be acknowledged as sport, it does suggest that the way in which sport is represented is fairly narrow. At the same time whilst the research on individuals and their definitions of sport and physical activity is fairly limited (more on this later, when I explore my own findings in relation to this) it also suggests restricted notions of sport. In fact Scott Porter explored top-of-mind understanding of physical activity and their findings suggested that spontaneous points of reference among the middle aged tended to be structured activity, within ‘the gym or outdoor pitches, such as specific facilities and public arenas’ (2002, p.36).

It is clear that the definitions give some insight into sport as an activity and as a category, but there remains a concern with getting to the ‘core’ of sport and offering ‘precise boundaries’ in defining sport (Meier, 1981, pg. 79). This obsession may be misguided, as sport and physical activity, viewed as a subjective experience may be defined differently by each person. However, commonly the definitions focus on the nature of the action and exclude the individual’s perspective on this. The concern with defining sport is not surprising given the need to justify public investment and, establish growth of industry and professional status. As Jordan noted this has been an issue for other areas of leisure, when she says “For tourism to be ‘manageable’ it needs to be explicable and must have definitional boundaries” (2003, p.35) (and within this we could replace tourism with sport). I would argue that sport and physical activity may not be easily defined and that the desire for an essentialist definition of sport should be set aside, in order to explore people’s own definitions of sport and their views of sport participants. Within this study I will take an open perspective on this, leaving the definition of sport and physical activity for the participants.

2.3 SPORT PARTICIPATION EXPLANATIONS

Having considered the distinctions between different definitions of sport and participation, I now examine research which focuses on examining sport participation. In this section I will review the explanations from previous literature, seeing what we can learn from these, focusing in particular on those aspects most relevant to this study and commenting on their strengths and weaknesses.

2.3.1 Psychological explanations

Psychological studies have focused on explaining participation and/or drop out by examining theories of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, personality, self perception and expected outcome. The studies have focused on adolescence and above, as few psychological variables have been assessed with children, due to their limited cognitive abilities to self-report (Sallis, 2000). Several scholars cite that extrinsic motivations of institutions and other people; school, friends and parents are the main motivators. Among adolescents perceived self-competence, fitness, affiliation, teamwork, competition and fun were identified as significant motivators (Kremer et al, 1997). A number of authors have identified that people will be influenced by expected outcomes such as improved health, staying in shape, weight control or improved personal appearance (Duda & Tappe, 1988; Finkenberg et al, 1994; Gill et al, 1996; Shephard, 1995). Many young people withdrew from sport because of lack of interest and enjoyment and Kremer et al (1997) showed that the most important motivational variables young people associated with interest in physical education were 'preference for challenge', linked to achievement orientation, and 'curiosity'. However, as children grew older there was a shift from intrinsic to extrinsic motivation.

There have been numerous reports on the influence of personality, on participation and continuation (Busby, 1997, p.195). In particular individual achievement orientation, participation in a programme that suits the individual's achievement disposition, perceptions of control over health and physical activity patterns; self-perception of ability and efficacy will influence intention to participate (Biddle, 2002; Roberts & Brodie, 1992; Weiss and Chaumeton, 1992). A scan of research in this area also raises the possibility that gender, age and other social factors may influence achievement orientation and competitiveness. Ryckman and Hamel (1995) found in their study of 154 high school students that hyper competitiveness was the strongest and only predictor of male sport participation, but this was unrelated to female participation.

Perception of self efficacy and confidence to participate in the activity situation were found to be important in the choice and maintenance of physical activity

programmes. There appears to be a marked gender effect of athletic competence with increasing age. Perception of competence is also related to assessment of one's own control over participation. The person's belief about their participation ability and whether they can change, influence or have a choice over participation reflects the degree of self determination people believe that they have (Biddle, 2002). Where people perceive themselves to be in control they are more likely to participate. Coakley and White (1992) found that young people want to participate where they see an opportunity to display or extend their competence. Perceived competence is a primary motivator "For example, a 13 year old dancer explained that she liked dancing 'because I know myself I can do it' (Coakley & White, 1992; p.26). However, self-competence may be only one factor contributing towards the individual's perception of control, a range of antecedents such as education, access etc as previously discussed may help or hinder participation.

Overall, the psychological studies offer some insight into the personal characteristics associated with participation and in turn they note that intervention work has been completed. However, they are limited to this explanation and to positivistic methodological approaches, in the main. In fact socialisation approaches have been more central to explaining sport participation and I turn to these next.

2.3.2 Structural functionalism and populist based explanations

The early studies of sport participation were dominated by research grounded in structural functionalism and empiricist assumptions. A review of the first 'Handbook of Social Science of Sport', edited in 1981 by Luschen and Sage (see Coakley & Dunning, 2000, p.xxv-xxvii) shows this approach in all but one chapter.¹⁹²⁰ The traditional studies in this vein focused on explaining the characteristics of sport participants and constraints on sport participation. Equally they were interested in measuring impact on personal and social development, with a focus on 'What sport does to people'? According to Coakley in the early research on socialisation, those asking the questions were policy makers or programme providers with a vested

¹⁹ G.P. Stone's chapter which takes a symbolic interactionist approach was the exception.

²⁰ Dunning (2002) however observes that Luschen and Sage is not representative of sport sociology at the time, as it misses out developments in figurational and conflict approaches in the 1970s.

interest in looking at the outcomes of sport participation and proving that these were positive. The questions focused on "...who participated in sports, how they became involved, why they participated and how they were changed by participation" (Coakley in Horne et al, 2001, p.130) and this was generally addressed with a quantitative approach. The studies focused on who or what influences people to play sport? Key socialisation effects, such as mediating gatekeepers; parents, peers, teachers and coaches (Coakley and White, 1992; De Knop, 1999; McElroy, 2002; Sallis, 2000), culture and opportunity through schools and institutions were deemed to have a critical role in passing on the sport role to young people by encouraging and reinforcing (Greendorfer, 1992; McPhail and Kirk, 2006; Scheerder et al, 2006).²¹ This latter view was behind the critical assumption made on the importance of providing a secure foundation for future participation. At the same time constraints were explored and it was noted that the likelihood of socialisation into sport was influenced by class, ethnic background, gender, age and education.

UK research taking this approach included popularised forms of functionalism used to justify investment or development in sport. A number of significant²² studies of sport participation, in common with research of the structural functionalist bent have focused on the characteristics of sport participants and largely give a picture of trends. The studies of children and young people's participation include large-scale studies of sport provided by the Sports Councils (Kremer et al, 19997; Mason, 1995; Sport England, 2000a, 2002b), and a considerable numbers of physical activity studies, from academic sources (Armstrong, 1994; 2002; Cale and Almond, 1992; Pate et al, 1996; Sallis et al, 2000; Sleaf and Warburton, 1996).²³ The earliest national scale sport participation evaluation in the UK focusing on adults was part of 'The General Household Survey (GHS) (OPCS, 1973-1997), a general government funded survey of social trends, conducted every 3 years. The survey included sport and recreation related questions from 1973 until 1997.²⁴²⁵ The Allied Dunbar

²¹ Greendorfer (1992) also identified personal attributes, such as personality, achievement orientation, and competence as another set of factors that influence participation, but socialisation is the focus here.

²² These studies are significant in scale, not always in scope, but have considerable dissemination impact in practice and academia with frequent citation in other studies.

²³ Prior to the 1950s there had been only estimates of children's physical activity participation, after this point a range of extensive surveys have tested children and adolescents.

²⁴ Coalter provided a key paper with a critical in-depth reanalysis of the GHS data, which made some attack on previous conclusions on sport participation (Coalter, 1999; Sport England/UK Sport, 2001).

National Fitness Survey (ADNFS) (Sports Council & HEA, 1992) was produced in the intervening years, and was a physical activity study, with a focus on sport also. From a sample of 6,000 adults (16 years of age and over), 4,316 completed a home interview and 75% of this group participated in a physical appraisal.²⁶ In the late 1990s an Anglo-Italian funded partnership initiated the COMPASS (1999) study, to seek the co-ordinated monitoring of participation in sports in Europe.²⁷ More recently Sport England has continued to track trends in participation with 'The Active People Survey', (2006a) and The Taking Part Survey (2007a). Overall there is a clear distinction within the body of studies between those that purely report on trends in amount, frequency and intensity of participation levels and those that make attempts to explain participation data.

All these studies suggest links between participation and personal characteristics. Simply put, among the adult population the odds of being sedentary increased for older subjects, who had self-perceived lifestyle problems, had lower scores on education, low motivation to exercise, negative participation experiences in physical activity and who did not recognise the need to exercise more for health benefits. The odds of being active were associated with opposite characteristics (Mullineaux, 2001). Studies have also shown that for children and young people, socialisation effects of support from parents, teachers and peers (Mason, 1995; Sallis, 2000), knowledge of and access to facilities or outdoor settings, and programme opportunities (Kremer et al, 1997; Mason, 1995, Sallis, 2000, Sport England, 2000a), perceived physical competence (Sallis, 2000), psychological motivation and

²⁵ There are a greater number of large-scale adult studies, but it is difficult to take an overall view of these as the different sources use various methodologies and have different conceptual definitions of sport, which I will comment on later in this section. Again, they can be broadly divided into those that provide a picture of participation trends and those that explain these trends (with varying degrees of substantiation). There are also a number of PA studies examining adult participation, but for the purposes of this study reference will be limited to those that focus on sport (Sports Council & HEA, 1992 and Mullineaux, 2001).

²⁶ Ten years after the original ADNFS study (1992), Mullineaux et al (2001) offered an interesting reanalysis of the study data, using logistic regression. Whilst still only making a comparison between those who were active versus sedentary it provided a means to determine individual propensity to participate in adequate physical activity.

²⁷ The first phase of this study was secondary analysis of the different analytical frameworks and methodologies of 28 countries, to provide a picture of sport participation studies in Europe. Cross-European SP study comparisons had been attempted before (Rodgers, 1977). COMPASS (1999) has a more missionary style role and so to provide witness to the analytical framework proposed, they clearly needed to show the aims and proposed outcomes, if they were to persuade other countries to change their national survey methodologies.

inhibitors (Kremer et al, 1997) and preference and interest in the activity (Kremer et al, 1997; Mason, 1995) will influence participation. Much of the research also suggested that positive early experiences of sport had an impact on participation and I consider this point in detail later (Armstrong, 2002; Sallis, 2000).²⁸

2.3.2.1 What do we know from social factor studies?

These studies can tell us something of the picture of participation and the characteristics of participants and non-participants. I have referred to these influences in chapter 1 (p.7-8) and as age, gender and constraints and enablers, are of particular relevance to this study I will introduce their ideas further here.

Age

A number of authors support the argument that age is the most important factor influencing sport participation (McPherson, 1984; Rudman, 1989). There is concern among health professionals about the low levels of participation of older age groups (Dishman, 2001; O'Brien Cousins, 2001; WHO, 2007a). A linear decrease in participation is observed as people age, with a slight acceleration after 18 years of age and then again after 45, and this has been widely observed and accepted (Department of Health, 2003; Sport England/UK Sport, 2001; Sport England, 2007a).²⁹ We know that there are activities that are more popular with middle and older age groups (see table 1, appendix A). We also know that Masters and Veterans sport participation has increased in recent years.³⁰ However, we know very little about the reasons for participation and preferences.

²⁸ Two of the studies attempted to explain PA participation trends, by going beyond their data and building on other academic literature (Kremer et al, 1997) and in the case of Sallis (2000) by a review of 108 physical activity studies.

²⁹ The 60-69 age group was the only one to see a growth in sports participation, between 1993-1996 (Rowe et al, 2004b).

³⁰ Masters sport originated in the 1970s and offers the opportunity for those who wish to keep competing beyond youth and early adulthood. It is positioned as an alternative to mainstream sport, founded on an emphasis of 'health, fitness and pleasure through the joy of participation and competition' (O'Bryan, 1985; p.12). Generally Masters and Veteran categories in sport start at 30 or 35 years of age.

In some research the age process itself is sometimes considered to be causal, but frequently age is linked to participation by its relationship with or effect on other variables. For example, ageing has been associated with increases in poor health or perceptions of health as a barrier to participation (Finch, 1997; Hirvensalo et al, 2005; Mullineaux, 2001). Others suggest that activity preferences, motivations and perceived self-competence change across age. (De Knop et al, 1999; Mullineaux, 2001). Ageing may intensify the influence of other participation determinants (Finch, 1997). From the data available it is unclear how some determinants of participation may become more critical at particular ages, for example Rudman (1989) identified that time may be the most important factor influencing involvement in sport and physical activity, for the 35 to 50 age group. So whilst these studies identify again and again, that participation declines with age, and that no other leisure activity is 'more likely to be abandoned or avoided by the old as regular physical activity' (Grant, 2001; p.779), the studies tell us little about how ageing and the life course actually influence participation and we need to turn to other research for this (see interpretive research in this area on p. 56).

Gender

As with age, there are some clear gender differences in participation identifiable in the social factor studies. Put simply males are far more likely to participate in sport, than females, regardless of other social characteristics (Department of Health, 2003; Sport England, 2000a; Sport England/UK Sport, 2001; Sport England, 2007a). However, within this overall trend there are differences. There have been some increases in participation by women. In 1986 the GHS showed that women accounted for 42.2% of adults who participated in at least one sport in the 4 weeks prior to interview, and women outnumbered men in their participation in indoor sport (Sport England/UK Sport, 2001). However, overall the levels of participation are concerning, particularly when looking at frequent participation (Sport England, 2006a).³¹ In fact, the effect of gender does depend on the activities, which are examined as women's participation centres on a narrower band of activities than

³¹ Whilst it is concerning that just less than a ¼ of men (24%) participated in at least 30 minutes of sport and active recreation 3 times week, less than a 1/5th (18%) of women participated (Sport England, 2006a).

men's. Hall et al (2002) have demonstrated that a highly significant ($<.001$) relationship emerged between gender and the activities selected for 'working out' and also preferred exercise intensity. Men preferred sport activities, whilst women's choices were wider and more eclectic, spread across 'sports, aerobic classes, home fitness equipment, and running, biking and walking' (p.81). The importance of keep fit/yoga/aerobics/dance exercise is shown in its popularity among women and girls (Coalter, 1999; Mason, 1995; Sport England, 2002b). The narrow range of activities, (which appears to be repeating itself when studies of young people are examined (Sport England, 2000a) represents the majority of women's' participation in sport and physical activity.

However, whilst the social factor studies identify differences in participation by gender, this does not in itself demonstrate a gender effect, as they offer little explanation of why this occurs. It is clear that gender effects are intensified by combination with other factors, motherhood, ageing, poverty and socialisation in particular (see Coalter, 1999; Collins, 2003; Currie, 2004; Daley and O'Gara, 1998; Lewis & Ridge, 2005, Wearing, 1990 for more). Usefully research has moved on to explore the meaning of sport and the experiences of women and men, particularly through school and physical education (Flintoff and Scraton, 2001; Hargreaves, 1994; Penney, 2002 for example) and there are other studies looking at adult experiences (Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Scott-Porter, 2002 for example).

Constraints and enablers to participation

Most of the studies taking a structural functionalist approach focus on identifying problems with non-participation and barriers in particular (Collins, 2003). In this section I briefly overview the studies taking this approach, as the problems I identified during critiques of this approach led me to, question the usefulness of any structural functionalist approach and instead to, identity and relationship work (see pp. 43 & 54) as this had more relevance for my study findings.

Much of the early work was based on a classic conceptualisation of 3 sources of barriers; structural, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Further to this categorisation, distinctions were drawn between 'antecedent' constraints, which may confine

expressed preference for leisure activities and ‘intervening’ constraints, which come between preference or desire and actual participation (Jackson, 1990).

The model has been widely used to understand participation (see table 3, in appendix A) and in particular was applied to specific social groups, especially women (Henderson & Allen, 1991; Shaw, 1994) however there has been growing discontent over the usefulness of a focus on barriers and this model has received well-documented challenges. Crawford et al. (1991) later provided a critical review of the original model suggesting that constraints appear hierarchically and offered updates to the approach as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Leisure Participation Constraints Model

Source of barrier	Examples	Impacts
Intrapersonal	Psychological states and individual attributes e.g. attitudes, anxiety	Leisure Preferences
Interpersonal	Interactions and relationships with others e.g. not having somebody to participate with	Interpersonal Compatibility and Co-ordination
Structural	Factors intervening between preferences and actual participation e.g. Financial resources, time available, climate	Participation (or Non-participation)

Source: Crawford, et al. (1991, p.313) and examples from Samdahl & Jekubovich (1997, p.431/431).

In criticism, the wealth of research has focused on constraints and non-participation and failed to consider what causes people to continue to participate or start a new sport (Raymore et al, 1994; Raymore 2002)³² This assumes that if constraints are

³² The dominant focus on constraints is not surprising as early work focused on public recreation and wanted to explain why some groups were participating less in order to reduce or remove barriers.

there they will impact participation, yet it may be that the perception and recognition of constraint is more critical. Some studies have highlighted the importance of interpretation and perception of constraint from the participant's perspective. The importance of considering the subjective way in which each constraint is realised by individuals was apparent from Henderson and Ainsworth's study, noting that when women cited a factor, e.g. time, they did not necessarily feel that this was the real constraint, as there were underlying dimensions to the lack of time. "One AA woman said... 'I talk about lack of time, etc., but you know, time is the sorta thing you can make available when you want'" (2000, p.318). Recognition of constraint appeared to depend on the desire to actually participate (Raymore et al, 1994), whether an individual was actually participating and on life constraints in general. "...Women who have limited time, money or access to facilities may adjust their expectations to fit the reality of their lives. Thus, they may not necessarily perceive or report such factors as constraints" (Shaw, 1994; p.11).

The focus on constraints leads to the inherent assumptions that in the absence of constraint participation will take place because the leisure in question is positively valued and desirable. All want to participate and if someone does not participate it is because they are unable to. However, perhaps sport is not always the 'positive and desirable experience or activity' assumed within the constraints literature (Shaw, 1994, p.12). This assumption has been challenged, with authors suggesting that the desirability and value depend on the context and meaning of the activity (Henderson & Ainsworth, 2000; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997). It may be that people who do not like sport, are not always constrained.

Lastly, a number of authors suggest that constraints can be negotiated, including Jackson et al (1993), suggesting that there could be individual or collective ways of resisting constraints (Shaw, 1994) and identifying enablers to participation (Henderson et al, 1996; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2000; Raymore 2002, Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997).³³ The traditional conceptualisation of constraints (Crawford et al, 1991) is seen as a one-way process, with individuals adapting and adjusting to

³³ A variety of terms have been used to explain participation despite constraint such as resistance, negotiation and balancing; and the participation has been linked to motivation, enablers and facilitators.

constraints, rather than balancing and negotiating. Samdahl and Jekubovich (1997) in contrast, found evidence that people are not passive responders to constraints, instead they, by interacting with others created leisure time. Likewise individuals can participate despite the presence of the so-called constraints. It would appear that participation will depend on the importance of the activity, the way or level of constraint (Collins, 2003; Raymore, 1994; Shaw, 1994) and perception of constraint (Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997). Henderson and Ainsworth (2000) in a study of women's walking identified meaning, context, and access as key enablers. The meaning of the activity appeared to be particularly important, for example '...perceptions that walking was 'not really exercise' as exercise is often construed' had a key impact on participation (Henderson & Ainsworth, 2000; p.317). Participation may therefore depend on negotiation of constraints and the motivation to.

Overall, Samdahl and Jekubovich (1997, p.446) in a major challenge to the classic constraints model suggested that the participants in their study did not feel constrained, instead participants suggested that they balanced external demands with their personal interests. They found that people were structuring their lives in order to have time for leisure, and the most influence on this came from social relationships. This emphasised '...the interactional processes and dynamic patterns through which people were tied to and influenced by their social environments' (Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997, p.445). They noted limitations when constraints are focused on as a '...vehicle for studying the broader nature of leisure choices and meanings' (Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997; p.450).

2.3.2.2 Strengths and weaknesses of structural functionalism and populist studies

The last section showed problems with this research but studies that take this approach have improved our understanding of sport participation in important ways. They suggest that participation may have a complex set of influences and they contend that participation is socially patterned. Despite the lack of evidence they suggest that positive early experiences of sport, knowledge or benefits of exercise, and access to opportunities might affect a person's participation (Coakley, 2003).

However, the main sport participation data sets are understandably just that and are limited in the explanation they can offer of sport participation and the issues with these need to be considered. Five limitations must be highlighted;

First sport participation is narrowly defined in the surveys, and the studies are limited by a failure to examine the individuals own understanding of sport. The time required for 'open question' analysis would be prohibitive within public research on this scale. Essentially participants are asked to list participation from tick lists of mainstream, competitive sports within sport surveys and within physical activity studies there may be no record presented of the actual activity, beyond a broad sport category. There have been several surveys that include other forms of active recreation (Sport England, 2006a, 2007a), but in some cases these are grouped together without sensitivity to the nature of the activities or included in an 'other' category³⁴. These do not encourage reporting of active recreation. There have been some attempts to widen this out, and COMPASS (UK Sport, 1999) tried to distinguish between active sport and more general leisure and recreation activities, claiming that they would use a wide and inclusive definition of sport (Council of Europe, 1993). However, in practice COMPASS used an operational definition within their fieldwork, reflecting a traditional, mainstream approach to listing possible sport types, based on popular, stereotypical sport activities.³⁵ This is not a failure, as it is a difficult task to collect large-scale data on the full range of sport and recreation activities. This is important, however, as there has been no comprehensive assessment of the definition and meaning of sport and activity to research participants.

Second, these types of studies are limited by their chosen method, as they have mechanistic research tools, focusing on closed questions with fixed choices and

³⁴ In the 1999 survey of 'Young People and Sport' by Sport England (2000a), participants were asked to include activities they did 'just for fun', but this was in response to a tick list. Whilst the survey did include activities completed outside of school, there was a focus on organised sport (club and after-school). Categories in the survey did not always sensitively reflect the type of activities included e.g. 'canoeing' as a category label included 'rowing and water ski-ing.'

³⁵ There are no details of how the list of sports was derived (perhaps from the audit of European studies which showed a core of sports, but probably those deemed to be historical/popular activities, recognised by institutionalisation/competitive levels). This was seen as a common sense approach as the difficulties of using wide definitions of sport, within the tight parameters of a mechanistic survey had been recognised by the COMPASS research team (UK SPORT, 1999).

scales. Little qualitative research has been employed, and where this has been, it has focused on sport providers, rather than the participants, e.g. teachers (Mason, 1995, Sport England, 2000a) and coaches (Kremer et al, 1997). This problem has also been noted in regard to the data on participation and ageing by Grant (2001) and, Grant and O'Brien Cousins who suggested that by relying on quantitative research

...the ineffable and less tangible are either suppressed or absent. Hence, the stories about ageing and physical activity are incomplete, and the central character (i.e. the older person) is hidden from the text.

(Grant and O'Brien Cousins, 2001, p.238)

Overall, many different methods have been used, examining different criteria and measures for participation and these make comparison difficult, even within studies over time.³⁶ The scale of surveys is extensive, but the scope is limited.

Third, whilst the surveys ask some useful questions, there appear to be very important questions that are consistently missed. As Mullineaux (2001) and Coalter (1999) showed there is an extensive range of social factors that may influence the individual's participation, yet other studies do not collect data on all of these. Yet, in many cases authors infer particular explanations which cannot be substantiated by their data. For example, there are several claims made about youth socialisation and life long participation effects, but these are clearly under explained (Armstrong, 2002; Sports Council & HEA, 1992). In fact the studies fail to capture participation as a dynamic process where peoples' behaviour changes over time. Other studies (Grant, 2001; Hedges, 1986; Raymore, 1995; Scott-Porter, 2002; Vanreusel, 1997 among others) do look at the process of participation change and these will be examined, later.

Fourth, the focus of the studies has been on the relationship between generic social factors and participation patterns.³⁷ Studies generalise about individuals, there is no sensitivity to the individual motives and circumstances that aggregate into the overall pattern. The viewpoint of observers, rather than participants, dominates. The studies

³⁶ The GHS (OCPS, 1973-1997) is an illustration: changes to questions within the sport related section mean that it is only possible to compare data sets from 1987 onwards.

³⁷ In the case of Coalter (1999), Mullineaux (2001) and Kremer et al. (1997) there are attempts to use other academic literature to consider the impact of social factors and these are stronger, but generalisations are made.

are limited in the extent to which they provide a basis for understanding the personal experiences of participants, and patterns and trends in participation, as could be seen in my earlier discussion of age and gender effects from these studies.

Finally, there has been limited attempt to go beyond description and basic explanation and the research lacks adequate theoretical background. Whilst the practice based studies lack theoretical explanation, the academic studies using a structural functionalist approach are limited by their understanding of people as 'passive learners' to be socialised into sport. There is an inherent conservative bias, with an emphasis on the normative element, through a desire to preserve the system, rather than look to challenge or change it. The studies ignore the ongoing nature of participation, with an overemphasis on the determination of present participation.

As Coakley acutely observes,

Some of these studies have helped us understand certain aspects of sport and socialisation but many of them have presented inconsistent and contradictory findings. With notable exceptions, data on the causes and benefits of playing sports have tended to be superficial, and they have told us little about sport socialisation as an ongoing process in people's lives. They have given us fuzzy snapshots, rather than clear videos, of socialisation.

(Coakley, 2003, p.99)

In summary the structural functionalist perspective is limited by its deterministic understanding of participation, its hyper-scientific bias towards large scale quantitative surveys, the macro-structural approach and confusion over the relative influence of different socialising agents (Horne et al, 2001). This approach has failed to conceptualise sport participation as an individually constructed activity, centred on an active agent who is interdependent with others (Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997, p.446); instead seeing it as an action caused in a linear way, by social and psychological factors, whilst critically ignoring the individual within this. This approach has dominated populist approaches to examining sport participation, and whilst the current Sports Council research agendas show a move away from this, this is only very recent and is limited.³⁸ However, at least within academia there has

³⁸ Only a limited amount of studies conducted by the Sports Councils have taken a qualitative approach (Foster et al, 2005), although a number of others collected some qualitative data. A review of overall studies on participation by Sport England (Foster, 2005) shows a very limited amount of qualitative studies (7 pages on quantitative large scale studies and 4 pages on qualitative).

been clear recognition that participation might be better understood from an interpretative and interactive perspective of the individual and society (see Coakley, 2003; Fishwick & Greendorfer, 1987; Greendorfer & Bruce, 1991).

2.3.3 Interpretive approach explanations

As demonstrated in the review of age and gender and socialisation effects, interpretive studies might offer greater insight. I now provide more detail on these³⁹. In reaction to the problems identified with earlier socialisation research (Greendorfer and Bruce, 1989, Stevenson, 1980 and Theberge, 1984) and criticism of the constraints research, this new wave of sport participation research emerged. McPherson had argued for a new approach to socialisation studies based on Wentworths (1980) critique of the 'almost dichotomous 'sociologistic' and individualistic orientations to socialisation' (see McPherson, 1986; p.115). They suggested that there was too much emphasis on examining outcomes, such as sport participation levels, and that more emphasis was needed on process of participation. The new studies were grounded in a number of theoretical perspectives, symbolic interaction in the 1970s and a cultural studies approach in the 1980s, although the interactionist is perhaps best represented.

Commonly this research focused on the individual, their experience, and how they associate and identify with this. The studies looked at why people took up, choose to continue or why people dropped 'in and out' of participation. In this research people are viewed as active, interactive and interdependent with others, rather than as passive learners. Critics of constraints and enablers correlational studies identified the importance of personal agency which was not explored with previous frameworks (Raymore, 2002; Samdhal and Jekubovich, 1997). Theberge (1984) in particular felt that focusing on the characteristics of sport participants, or on the process of socialisation into sport roles alone, could not adequately explain sport participation. Essentially she proposed that an examination of identity would be more

³⁹ I will look at interpretive approaches to age and sport as a separate section, but will make comment on gender aspects throughout the following sections, rather than in a separate section as this is explored more in chapter 6.

insightful into sport participation, as socialisation is the process through which identity develops. As Horne et al neatly summarises:

Interactionist studies of sport socialisation looked at the social construction of identity, the dynamics of participation decisions and the social meanings underlying sport participation.

(Horne et al, 2001, p.139)

The studies have generally used interpretive and qualitative methods, in contrast to the traditional quantitative survey methods. Overall, the studies were attempts to answer questions that had been repeatedly ignored, as Coakley and White comment:

This means that instead of focusing on the statistical correlates of sport participation, non participation or dropping out of sport, those in the sociology of sport might spend their time more fruitfully by studying decision-making processes in the lives of young people. When the focus is on decision-making rather than sport participation/non-participation, it is clear that there must be a concern with process, context and human agency. The literature in the sociology of sport probably has enough studies reporting lists of sport participation patterns with accompanying lists of variables associated with those patterns for particular people at particular points in time. There seems to be a need for more accounts of ongoing actual experiences and the decisions related to those experiences.

(Coakley & White, 1992, p.34)

There appear to be four assumptions at the heart of interactionist perspectives, around the construction of identity, decision making, cultural value, and relationships and negotiation of involvement in sport.

2.3.2.1 Research on Sport Identity

Research taking an interpretive approach examined sport as a site of social construction and meaning making, where people make sense of who they are and how they connect to others, thereby shaping their own identity (Coakley, 1993). A discussion of what is meant by sport identity follows, as well as a review of studies which look at self-identity as a possible explanation of sport participation and decision making. There are a growing number of sport identity studies⁴⁰ and I

⁴⁰ The studies have variously focused on different stages of sporting involvement, becoming an athlete (Coakley and Donnelly, 1999; Stevenson, 2002); entering sub-cultures (Donnelly and Young, 1988), coping with retirement (Grove et al., 1997; Webb et al., 1998), transitions out of compulsory school sport (Hendry et al, 1993; Roberts, 1997); different groups, such as elite athletes (Adler and Adler, 1989; Balague, 1999), disabled participants (Martin et al., 1995), spectators (Armstrong and Giuilianotti, 1999; Jones, 2000; Laverie and Arnett, 2000), novices in organised sports (Donnelly and Young, 1988); influence of different social factors, gender (Mennesson, 2000), ethnicity (Harrison, Jr.

explore some of the findings from these, where linked to participation. In this section I consider some of the key findings on sport and identity, looking specifically at identity construction and careers, and I then introduce the work of two particular sport participation and identity based researchers, Coakley and White (1992) and Thomsson (1999). I focus on these particular studies as they explore the sport and physical activity experiences of people, who may or may not be, involved in activity, unlike other studies which have explored active sport sub-cultures (Beal, 2001; Stevenson 2002, Tsang, 2000 Wheaton & Tomlinson, 2001) or particular groups (e.g. mothers Lewis & Ridge, 2005; Wearing, 1990). The studies have resonated with my findings and become points of reference for my research.

Defining sport identity

There is no clear and consistent definition of what is meant by sport identity and this is in line with problems with defining self-identity. Definitions vary according to the disciplinary perspective and ‘self’ has been used as a container for all kinds of self-reference. As Devis-Devis and Sparkes observe:

...the notion of the self is a battlefield that has been cross-cut so often by various warring disciplines and discourses that there is no consensus whatever on what it means.

(Devis-Devis & Sparkes, 1999, p.20)⁴¹

However, researchers when discussing sport identity commonly focus on the individuals identification of self with sport, their constitution of their sense of ‘who I am’ through sport, and being identified by others as sport participants or athletes

et al., 2002; McClancy, 1996); and different types of identity; athletic (Hale et al., 1999; Horton and Mack 2000; Martin et al., 1995) leisure (Curry and Weaner, 1987; Kelly, 1983; Haggard and Williams, 1992; Shamir, 1992), and others. Within these studies there have been focuses on the process of identity formation (Donnelly and Young, 1988; Stevenson, 2002), salience of identity (Curry and Weaner, 1987; Shamir, 1992), and links with motivation (Curry and Weiss, 1989), orientation (Martin et al., 1995), meaning and value (Balague; 1999; Stevenson, 2002) and memory (Healey, 1991) of activities/identities, knowledge and/or, perception of past experience (Coakley and White, 1992; Donnelly and Young, 1988) and the symbolism of activity involvement (Haggard and Williams, 1992).

⁴¹ I visited and revisited writings on self-identity in order to conceptualise and construct an understanding of identity and I explore this in later chapters. However, a review of the identity concept is beyond the scope of this chapter and instead I return to this in later discussion chapters where I explore this alongside my findings.

(Coakley and Donnelly, 1999; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2007). Identity can be formed by commitment to a role or behaviour (Kleine et al., 2006). Different authors have suggested that people might be viewed as athletes (Brewer et al, 1993; Hale, 1999; Martin, 1995); sporting (Hargreaves, 1994), or sports people (Donnelly & Young, 1999), or 'active' (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Shaw et al, 1995) and yet these labels might have different meaning and connotations. An identity based on sport is variously referred to as athletic identity (Brewer et al, 1993), sport identity and as part of social identity. The strength of, and identification with, the sport or athletic role can vary within the overall self identity, and Brewer et al (1993) describe athletic identity as the relative importance of the role within the individual's identity.

Common elements of definitions of sport identity within research are therefore:

- Labelling by self and others
- The importance of the experience to the individual
- The centrality of the activity in the person's life.

Whilst social psychological measurements of athletic identity have been assessed by attitude and commitment (Brewer et al, 1993), most of the alternative sociology based studies have acknowledged that identity will be subjectively defined by the participants and others. However, the definitions of sport identity are problematic because there is limited application to general sport participants, with instead an overt focus on elite or committed sports people. Additionally the conceptualisations of sport identity do not deal with identification with sport by non-participants. In order to consider the concept of sport identity further, it is necessary to see how it is constructed.

Identity construction

Part of the conceptualisation relates to whether it is possible to form a sport identity, as part of an overall self-concept? Can sport form an identity base? As identified there is a reasonable amount of work on athletic identity, where the commitment to the sporting role of competitive athletes is explored. These athletes have been found to commit themselves so fully to the role, there is 'role restriction' (Taylor et al, 2006, p.603). The heavy involvement in sport has also been explored, as a sense of

‘athletic career’ (Stevenson, 2002). Beyond the highly committed, there is evidence of the development of sport identity, through Donnelly and Young’s (1988, 2001) research of novices developing sub-cultural identities as they become committed to sport activities. However, this work does look at the construction of an identity through full participation in rock climbing and mountaineering, rather than an overall sport identity. Other authors point to individuals using their sense of self-identity as a reference point to consider whether sport participation fits with this (Coakley and White, 2002; Haggard and Williams, 1992; Harrison Jr. et al, 2002).

Several of the authors use role theory to explore sport identity (Gibson and Pennington-Gray, 2005; Kleine et al, 2006; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007). Role identities linked to participation develop over time, as novices move through pre-socialisation, discovery, construction, maintenance and disposition (Donnelly and Young, 1988; Klein & Klein, 2000). The relative importance of the role informs the position of the sport identity in the individual’s global self-concept (Gibson, 2005; Goffman, 1971, 1972a; Klein et al, 2001). As such Gibson (2005, p.211) talks about ‘serious participation’, Stevenson (2002) about a sense of ‘career’ due to the importance of the role to the individual, in the case of Masters sport and Stebbin’s (1992) describes this as ‘serious leisure’. However, role identity might be formed for identities which are of low, as well as high, importance to the individual, but the degree to which the individual labels themselves with the particular identity will depend on role person merger (Kleine et al, 2006). The greater the role person merger, the more the identity factors in their self-definition, evaluation and self-labelling and the more time is spent on, and social ties held, with the activity.

Within the overall self-identity there will be dominant roles at the centre and these are usually roles such as parent, partner, worker, but for highly committed individuals this may be a sport role where it has become a central life interest. For others sport will form another role, this may be a peripheral or ephemeral role. Gibson and Pennington-Gray (2005, p.462) when looking at golf tourism, note that an ephemeral role, provides a break from day-day roles and may complement ordinary life. Gibson also noted that sport tourism participation might provide “a

major source of identity for individuals and provide them with a sense of community, which might be lacking in other parts of their lives, or compliments their everyday roles” (2005, p.211). In this sense there may be conflict between roles or sport may complement others.

Roberts in contrast argues that leisure (and he includes sport as part of this) cannot form the basis of identity because of its own ‘core functions’ for expression (1997, p.1). He argues that leisure does not have a key role as an identity base for young people as he says:

Young people’s core self concepts retain familiar bases in gender, family, ethnic and educational backgrounds, and experiences in the labour market. Leisure pursuits affect how young and older people feel about themselves and add fine detail to their social identities but do not tell them or others who they basically are.

(Roberts, 1997, p.1)

Overall he seems to suggest that leisure participation can only add to the detail of overall identity. Roberts would argue that young people use leisure as a means of expression, rather than as a basis for identity development.

Identity change and life events

As Phoenix and Sparkes surmise:

...identities are fluid rather than fixed and they can be multiple and contradictory, wanted and unwanted, positive or negative or about sameness and difference. Collections of identities make up the self that is itself changeable over time.

(Phoenix & Sparkes, 2007; p.16)

The identity development models mentioned previously, suggest that individuals who have developed identities enter periods of identity maintenance, latency, disposition. There is clearly a link between identity change and the life cycle (Andreasen, 1984; Klein et al, 2001). The transition to adult life (Raymore, 1995), with the associated onset of new roles; and young adulthood, when role overload is common, may result in guilt when individuals feel they are not completing role obligations to others. (Klein et al, 2001). These transitions may lead to major modification of an existing role identity or ceasing. They may ask the questions ‘Is it

time to stop doing this?’ or ‘Is it still me?’ (Piliavin and Callero, 1991), whilst for others retirement may be forced by injury or decline in performance with competitive sport (Partington et al, 2005). At another point, older adults who retire or ‘empty their nest’ may be able to resume activities and identities (see Dionigi, 2004; Grant, 2001; Heuser, 2005). Clearly the previous literature suggests that identity and life event change are entwined.

Key studies on sport identity

Key studies suggested that sport participation involved a process of identity construction and confirmation and that all individuals would make participation decisions in relation to their sense of personal identity. My thinking was critically informed by Thomsson’s (1999) work with Swedish women, looking at constructions of themselves in relation to exercise and Coakley and White’s (1992) research of young people who were mainly non or minimal participants in sport. Both studies also demonstrate what we can learn about the gendered nature of participation experiences.

As I have noted several other authors (Donnelly and Young, 1988, 2001; Stevenson, 2002) showed a sense of how initial participation, might evolve into a sense of identity, but even when the individual did not become committed to an activity, decisions were clearly related to identity issues. Coakley and White (1992) focused on understanding sport participation. For this group sport was not central to their lives, in contrast to work on elite or competitive athletes samples (Stevenson 1990, 2002). Yet, even where there was little commitment to the activity, sport participation decisions were clearly based on a view of how this participation might fit with their view of themselves, and identity emerged as a critical factor influencing decision-making. As they note:

...decisions to participate in sports were generally based on the young persons’ conclusions that playing sport was consistent with their sense of who they were and what was important in their lives.

(Coakley & White, 1999, p.81)

This view is endorsed in research by Harrison Jr. et al, (2001) who noted that the view of a sport as identity appropriate may strongly influence participation. In their research racial stereotypes were explored, but this could apply to gender and age. They found that African American youth considered basketball, football, and track and field to be most appropriate, while excluding participation in other activities that they deemed inappropriate. This meant that their sport understanding was narrow (p.125). The findings of Coakley and White (1992) and Harrison Jr et al (2001) point to the key relationship between self-stereotyping about sport participation and the development of sport identity.

Coakley and White (1992) identified other identity issues:

- Control of presentation of self

Young people wanted to protect their sense of competence, esteem and the way in which they presented themselves. If sport did not allow this, they would be unlikely to participate.

- Becoming an adult

Sport participation decisions were influenced by identity concerns about becoming adults. 'Growing up' was a sensitive issue and they often chose activities that would allow adult role practice or involve being adult like. It appeared that sport participation decisions might be influenced by future identity aspirations. Sport clearly had to be linked to their view of adulthood, as independent and autonomous. This was critical as the development of identity is crucial in adolescence as young people move from a family to peer dominated setting (as also established in Harrison Jr et al, 2002).

- Expected gender behaviour and identity

Views on gender identity clearly had a strong influence on participation decisions and on identification with the activity itself. The young people felt that sport was more compatible with being a man than a woman, and that participation usually entailed involvement in an 'organized, competitive, physical activity' (Coakley & White, 1992, p.27) and this would not be expected for a female.

- Meaning of the activity

The definition of sport and classification of activities within this is critical to whether the individuals wished to identify with these. Being a sportsperson was associated with organised and competitive activity and not a wider range of physical activity. The value of this activity was clearly tied to the importance (or lack of) that it might have in fitting into their view of themselves.

- Influence of past participation experiences

Meaning of sport was also clearly associated with past experiences of sport, which influenced definitions of sport and views on whether it was appropriate to identify with it. “What had happened on school teams or in physical education classes served as the basis for what they expected in future sport experiences” (Coakley & White, 1992, p.31). This hinted that the memory of past experience appeared to be linked to identity.

Overall, young peoples’ sport participation decisions were seen to be influenced by their perception of how sport might fit into their self-identity, but also their perception of the labelling of sport activities and the ‘sportsperson’. In fact for most of the young people a key influence on their lack of participation was a rejection of a sport identity as it was incompatible with the way in which they viewed themselves.

Identity was a major factor in the decision making process, but simply being an athlete was not an identity that the young people...saw as satisfactory or satisfying in light of their self concept and overall life goals.

(Coakley & White, 1992 p.32)

Likewise Thomsson (1999) found that the women in her study considered the role of exercise in relation to their construction of themselves. Like, Coakley and White (1992), Thomsson (1999) noted that the decision to exercise or not, was influenced by several identity issues. The conception of and expectations of womanhood were important for the interviewed women. They related comments in the context of ‘This is what women are like’ (Thomsson, 1999; p.42). To many of them sport and exercise were more associated with the masculine gender role, than with the feminine. Many of the women were concerned by their self-presentation as a woman, desiring femininity and unmasculinity, and sport did not fit with this. They distanced themselves from sport as a way of being a woman. The article also highlighted the

importance of whether activities are perceived to be suitable and this appeared to be influenced by identity and role expectations. As Thomsson noted many of the females demonstrated the

...gender specific perspective that Lenskyj describes as task-orientated, qualitative, and altruistic rather than time-oriented, quantitative, and self-interested...The latter characteristics are the 'normal' characteristics of sports.

(Thomsson,1999, p.38)

While Coakley and White's (1992) findings relate to those whose participation is limited, the findings of Thomsson (1999) relate to a range of women so this clearly shows that identity might have a key influence on sport participation. Of course this does not mean that sport identity will be incompatible for everyone and also for those perceiving incompatibility, there may be other physical activities that they view as appropriate (Flintoff and Scraton, 2001). Overall, the studies on sport identity show that sport may have a role as a social identity if it is desired. This insight into decision-making was critical for informing my thinking on the role of personal agency in any sport participation and sport identity construction. This also suggested that any sense of sport identity might change over time, and might be tied to a negotiation between perceptions based on past experiences, the current value of the activity and, importantly, interaction with significant others.

2.3.3.2 Research on Meaning of sport

In line with the important influence of identity on decision making, Samdahl and Jekubovich (1997) found that peoples leisure was actively constructed according to the perceived value and meaning of the activity and the social context. There was a balancing between external demands and personal interests (Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997 p.446). This seems to suggest that the meaning and interest in activities (Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997, Raymore, 2002) may be a key influence on participation decisions. The focus on experience in sport within interpretive studies has also highlighted the importance of meaning. As Donnelly notes:

...interpretive sociology is about meaning, and in the sociology of sport we are beginning to attain a powerful sense of what sport means, and how sport means, in the lives of human beings

(Donnelly, 2001, p.85)

Studies have shown that there can be multiple meanings and definitions, of sport and sport participation created by the individual, and that it will be imbued with personal experience (Coakley and Donnelly, 1999; Seippel, 2006). As already noted in the definition section earlier in this chapter, there is discussion of what can be deemed sport and there will be difference between individuals and cultures in what is identified as a sport (Horne et al, 2001; Roberts, 2003).

A number of studies have given rich evidence of the meaning of sport. Among others, Beal (1999, 2001) looked at skateboarding sub-cultures, Theberge (1999) studied female ice hockey players, whilst Porterfield (1999) and Tsang (2000) explored their own experiences and meanings in rowing and Seippel (2006) explored the meanings of sport among members of voluntary sports clubs in Norway. The studies are currently small scale in number and scope, but this is an area of development⁴². The findings of these studies are varied due to the different sports under consideration, and the nature of the differences inherent in subjective experiences. None of these studies focus on sport or physical activity in general, as this study will do. However, commonly the studies have covered features, benefits and importance of the respective sports examined.

Some of the studies show common features of sport to be competition, organisation, social evaluation (Coakley & White, 1992), whilst others show that sport can mean, non-traditional activities which are less competitive, with a self-improvement focus (for example Beal, 1996). There is literature that suggests that individuals tend to have restricted definitions of what sport can be, based on childhood experiences. As Coakley and White claim, regarding a case study of young people in the UK:

They had learnt to define sport and sport participation in a very restricted manner. Their restricted definition led them to conclude that if the activity was not competitive, if there were no winners and losers, if there were no formal commitments to achievement and improvement, and if there were no organised teams or matches, then it was not sport.

(Coakley & White, 1992, p.26)

⁴² Seippel's (2006) study is larger in scale, with a response of 1,660 to a questionnaire on meanings assigned to sport, but with a survey question listing various reasons for taking part in sport. However, this does not allow for a deeper understanding of the members self recognised meaning making.

Research also shows that commonly any negative meanings and definitions of sport may be generalisations on previous experience (Healey, 1991).

Meaning is also linked to value of the activity. There have been several attempts to evidence the key benefits of sport and ideologies, commonly; character building, academic achievement, conformity, reduction in delinquency rates, conservative social and political behaviour, achievement orientation, moral development and health enhancement (Collins, 2003; Horne et al, 2001). Although there are no studies, to my knowledge of whether sport is valued for the same reasons by participants, though a number of studies do touch on this.

There is evidence of people absorbing established meaning of sport, with shared beliefs, values and norms (see Coakley & White, 1992; Coakley, 2003; Lake, 1998; Ogden & Rose, 2005) and of the cultural importance of sport (see Cohen & Avrahami, 2005; Mehus, 2005; Melnick & Wann, 2004). At the same time there is evidence of people creating different meanings of sport (Beal, 1999, 2001; Birrell & Richter, 1987; King and Thompson, 2001; Jarvis, 2006; Wheaton, 1997, 2000, 2004 among others). Birrell & Richter (1987) studied women's recreational soft-ball leagues in towns in the USA. Among their findings, the women attempted to create oppositional meanings for sport, by creating experiences that were 'process orientated, collective, supportive, inclusive and informed with an ethic of care' (Birrell & Richter, 1987; p.408). In another example Peter Thompson and I completed a study (King and Thompson, 2001) of 12 gay sports clubs (predominantly male membership) across the UK. We found that the gay sport club acted as an alternative to mainstream sport, where meanings are reinterpreted and resisted. Clubs had less focus on competitiveness, although still fielded competitive players/teams. The clubs created experiences that were less elitist, with a greater focus on recreation and fitness and were very inclusive of all ability levels, with only two clubs prioritising training and competition before recreation and fitness activities. So as sport is a socially constructed activity, the sport played at these clubs provides evidence of counter-cultural resistance.

Studies have also shown tensions between socially and personally interpreted meanings, with participants deriving meaning socially and accepting some of this,

whilst contesting other elements. Markula (1995) in a study of female aerobics participants found that they had various reasons for participating; enjoyment, improving their body, gaining increased energy for work, having time to themselves, and meeting and making friends. She also found that the participants questioned the contradictory beauty requirements of exercising to be thin and toned, to have no fat, but not develop too much muscularity. Likewise Frederick & Shaw (1998) found that body image was both a constraint from and into aerobics class participation for young women. These studies provide an example of public and private voices, showing the importance of listening to the various voices if meaning is to be understood and informed my desire to do this within my study.

The studies on experiences of sport do provide some base to understanding the meaning of sport, but there is still a greater focus on the objective, rather than an understanding of subjective meaning and interpretation of stages in sport involvement (Collin and Young, 1986; Heuser, 2005). Heuser (2005) looking at a group of female amateur bowlers showed that each stage of involvement had different subjective meanings for different women, as they came into the sport for different reasons, discovered that the sport appealed and found purpose in it, for different reasons and were motivated to move to other stages for a variety of reasons. It is important that the voices of meaning are considered for sport participation, accepting that these will be subject to change.

2.3.3.3 Research on Relationships

Socialisation is a two way process (see for example Coakley, 1993; Ogden & Rose, 2005) with interaction with significant others and their view on sport participation being influential. Various studies support the notion that relationships impact on leisure participation and preferences (Deem, 1986; Green, Hebron and Woodward, 1987; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997; Wimbush and Talbot, 1988⁴³). Earlier I noted that Samdhal and Jekubovich (1997) identified that leisure participation and

⁴³ It is acknowledged that Deem (1986), Green, Hebron and Woodward (1987), Wimbush and Talbot (1988) focus on women only. This research has revealed that social networks have a key influence on women's participation. From an early age there are signs that girls are more interested in leisure activities that involve social contact (Roberts and Parsell, 1994). Data on men is lacking, apart from as part of more general studies.

negotiation of constraints was influenced by social relationships. They reported that people would co-ordinate their leisure time to be with family and friends, compromise on activity choice for the sake of being with others, even if it was not an activity they would individually choose, and share leisure with others. This is also backed up by Heridge et al. (2003) who reported from a study of women's leisure in heterosexual romantic relationships, that women valued relationships and put a high priority on leisure with partners. They showed a 'desire for togetherness' and valued 'couple leisure' and made this a high priority in their lives (2003, p.286).

This desire to spend time with others could result in more time spent participating in leisure together, but this may not be sport. Coakley and White (1992) and Kremer (1997) identified that as romantic relationships become a priority for girls, in late adolescence, participation declines. In fact as adults move into partner and parent roles this may determine their participation, as illustrated by the concept of role determined leisure (Kelly, 1983). Various studies on family leisure (Shaw, 1997, others) report how family relationships may influence participation. Participating with children can increase an adult's overall participation level or it may constrain individual and autonomous activity (Harrington et al, 1992; Samuel, 1992). Thompson (1990, 1995) reported on qualitative research with women who played tennis and women married to male tennis players, in Australia. She noted that they managed their play in order not to disrupt their family's domestic life, but that the men's play did affect their role in the family, which the women had to compensate for. Often the family's involvement in sport becomes work, rather than participation for parents, particularly mothers (Shaw, 1992).

Sport can be sociable and social relationships can support this. Henderson and Ainsworth (2000) illustrated with examples of women walking for exercise who variously noted 'we catch up on our week' and that it was their 'gossip' time, it also allowed them to meet people (p.317). Sport participation was often as a result of the support of friends (Deem and Gilroy, 1998; Flintoff and Scraton, 2001; McElroy, 2002) and could be encouraged by social support and companionship or constrained by lack of a partner (Henderson and Ainsworth, 2000).

However, studies also report concerns regarding significant others views of their participation, and how the impact of participation on time spent with family, might require negotiation, particularly among older age groups (Colley, 1984; Deem and Gilroy, 1998; Grant, 2001; Scott Porter, 2002; Taylor, 2001). Particularly for females any participation needs to be managed around the family, 'pure leisure' (Raymore, 1995) may require the male partners approval. However, as an individual becomes more involved in sport they enter a sub-cultural group, and may choose to rely on confirmation from others involved in the sport (Donnelly and Young, 1988; Stevenson, 1999). As individuals they will still be concerned with the views of significant others and will be influenced by social group expectations, however acceptance within a sport sub-culture can give reassurance on a sense of personal identity, which may be at odds to the norms of the social group. People may in fact choose to build their relationships within the sport sub culture and this may provide stability for their participation (see for example Dionghi, 2004; Heuser, 2005).

2.3.3.4 Research on the experience of age and ageing

Overall there is a lack of research on adult sport and physical activity participation, with a continued focus on youth and young adult participation. There is growing research on older age groups (Finch, 1997), but this has often focused on the 50 plus bracket or even older (70 plus by Grant, 2001), variously labelled as the 'retired' or 'elderly' (Evenson et al, 2002). There is growing work in leisure on mid-life participation (Carpenter, 1989, 1997; Jordan, 2003; Thompson, 1995; Thompson et al, 2002) but there is very little research on mid-life sport participation and where this has occurred it is often focused on committed or professional participation (Heuser, 2005, Partington et al, 2005; Tulle, 2003 and Wainright and Turner, 2003)⁴⁴. Only two studies to my knowledge focus on sport and physical activity in the everyday lives of the middle aged. Gilroy (see Deem & Gilroy, 1998) interviewed 28 women, living in the English Midlands, ranging in age from early 20s

⁴⁴ There are some exceptions which have examined individuals in the mid-years but these have mainly focused on physical activity e.g. Scott Porter (2002) who explored issues and attitudes of men in mid-years to low levels of participation in physical activity.

to mid-sixties, with the majority in mid-life. She focused on the meanings and involvement in sports and physical activity and the negotiation of involvement with households. At the time of the research all had been physically active at some point in their lives and most still were. Scott-Porter (2002) explored issues and attitudes towards physical activity with 21 men in mid-life. Seven were lapsed participants, 8 stated that they had 'never really been active' (p.35) and 6 had a long-standing illness or were unable to work for medical reasons. Whilst providing some useful insight both studies provide only an aspect of participation in mid-life, men may experience activity differently to the women in Gilroy's study, and women and the active, may ascribe different meanings to activity to those found in Scott-Porters (2002) study.

Notwithstanding the limitations of representation, the following findings from the studies are particularly relevant. Not unexpectedly both studies illustrated the constraints of mid-life from managing family and work, suggesting that time is limited and to use this may require negotiation with others (Deem & Gilroy, 1998). Both Deem & Gilroy (1998) and Scott-Porter (2002) illustrate the middle aged individuals' expectations of bodily decline and some were already experiencing this. This concern is commonplace in the research on older adults. Whilst Deem & Gilroy (1998) report on individuals undertaking physical activity to ward off physical decline, most of Scott-Porter's (2002) respondents perceive the decline to be inevitable. They comment on the place of physical activity in younger life and take a nostalgic view of activity. This seems to show an early instigation of the age appropriate activity concerns, evident among older people (Coakley, 2003; Grant, 2001; Kluge, 2002). Elsewhere in the research we see that sport provides an opportunity for people to challenge the notion that it is just for the young (Coakley 2003; and see the example of Jo in Deem and Gilroy (1998). This is also illustrated in Partington et al's (2005) study where they showed amateur sport participants resisting notions that they should reduce their participation in mid-life.

Partington et al (2005) and Phoenix & Sparkes (2007) explored the expectations of the impact of mid-life on participation among committed athletes. Phoenix and Sparkes (2007) examined young athletes' perceptions of self-ageing, and future sport and physical activity. The young athletes identified three selves as future possibilities (Markus and Nurius, 1986); the preferred self 'almost past it', the reluctant self

‘stepping aside’ and the feared self ‘hanging on’ (p.6). In part these anticipated future selves had parallels with three different narratives depicted by Partington et al (2005) in their exploration of mid-life sport; ‘age is a state of mind’ (p.91)- a picture of resistance; ‘life begins at 40’ (p.93) – the notion of rejuvenation and lastly ‘growing old gracefully’ (p.95) - the concept of acceptance of the ageing process.

This work suggests some notions of positive ageing, ‘life begins at 40’ and ‘age is a state of mind’ but it is interesting that younger athletes have less positive expectations. Is ageing seen as a problem for participation in mid-life? Perhaps this depends on the notion of agency. There is some talk of a new midlife, where through lifestyle consumption, self-realisation and personal growth can be achieved.

We can now through the consumption of lifestyles, realise different ‘possible selves’ and actively determine how to be old: what to wear, where to live, how to look, and so on.

(Oberg, 2003; p.110)

Whilst these recent studies provide some insight into how active participants cope with mid-life transitions, they do not look at varied levels of participation. Overall, there is a lack of literature on mid-life and the developing interests focus on older adults. Even with the research on older adults, as McGuire (2000) and Long (2004) observe whilst there has been more research on sport and ageing in the US, little is known. It is also a case of limited focus, as Heuser astutely notes:

Consequently, in the drive to increase our understanding of the role of sports in older people’s lives, we may need to ascertain the personal meaning and value derived from such leisure pursuits rather than concentrate on their decreasing participation.

(Heuser, 2005, p.45)

This call however ignores the non-participant and within this study I intend to discover the meaning and experiences of non-participants and various participant levels within a younger age group, the middle age group.

2.3.3.5 Strengths and weaknesses of interpretive studies approach

Undoubtedly the interpretive studies approach has improved our understanding of sport participation, by focusing on the meaning and identification with the activity

for individuals and including their subjective accounts of this. This work can add to the picture provided by survey work, giving much more insight through detailed and rich description, and has become the dominant approach. However, there are some weaknesses with this. The studies focus on the individual, their relationships and the meaning of activity, and ignore the relationship between this and social structures and material conditions. Likewise, there is little written about the experiences in relation to power status or inequality. Dunning et al (1993, p.2) note that interactionist research is not historical and developmental enough. In fact the interpretive research is limited by its focus on the individual. With this approach there is also a focus on single sports, elite or active participation, with research on general society's view and participation limited to studies on non or little participation (Coakley and White, 1992, Scott-Porter, 2002), or women (Deem and Gilroy, 1999). There is also a dichotomy with studies that focus on active participants and non-participants, understandably as these groups are easier to identify, however this does not account for those with varied participation levels in between. This suggests that committed participation or non/low participation are the normal responses.

2.3.4 Developmental perspectives on sport participation

Whilst the wider constraints studies identify activity adherence as a determinant of later participation, a key group of studies have given greater attention to this lifelong participation.⁴⁵ These studies suggested that activity skills, habits, attitudes and values, and patterns of behaviour are established in childhood (Blair et al, 1989; Sallis and Patrick, 1994; Shephard, 1995). Some researchers have observed that life long participation (LLP) is associated with a positive youth sport experience (Daley, 2002; Green, 2000; Green et al, 2005; Roberts & Brodie, 1992; Roberts, 1996b; Scott and Willits, 1998), in particular late adolescent experience and organised sport activities (Scheerder et al, 2006). Others suggest that both positive and negative behaviours and attitudes to participation will be maintained, if developed at an early age (Kelder et al, 1994; Trudeau et al, 1999).

⁴⁵ These studies have used tracking, speculation, longitudinal and retrospective methods.

However, there is a lack of, and weak, empirical evidence for the assumed relationship between childhood and adult patterns of participation (Boreham and Riddoch, 2001; HEA, 1998; Mallina, 1996 and Shephard and Trudeau, 2000). Other authors find that while activity does not track through, inactivity does (Janz et al, 2000; Mallina 1996; Pate et al, 1999; Vanreusel et al, 1997). Similarly there is stronger evidence that it is those who are at extremes of a participation distribution who are likely to keep their relative participation level in adult life (Beunen et al, 2001; Kelder et al, 1994; Pate et al, 1999). Despite the weak evidence base there is a widespread assumption among sport providers, the media, and facets of academic literature, that people who exercise regularly in their youth and have positive experiences are more likely to continue, or to resume, exercise in later years (Abbott, 2006; ADNFS, 1992; Mullineaux et al, 2001). For example, physical educationalists tend to emphasise the ethos of preparing pupils for LLP with a rise in health related education and life sports provision (Campbell et al, 2001; Malina, 2001).

The studies focus on the importance of positive, regular and broad experiences in youth sport to engender long-lasting participation (Brenan and Bleakley, 1997; Curtis, 1999; Daley, 2002; Kremer et al, 1997; Sallis, 2000; Scheerder et al, 2006; Scott and Willits, 1998).⁴⁶ Some suggest that the LLP is supported by the school based PE programme (Green et al, 2005; Scheerder et al 2006), others that lifestyle or life time⁴⁷ activities, i.e. at youth level non-school or recreational sport might show a stronger tracking effect (Boreham and Riddoch, 2001; Roberts, 1996b; Sallis and McKenzie, 1991; Shephard and Trudeau, 2000). Several conclude that the youth experiences of sport need be broad to achieve any tracking effect into adult participation (Daley, 2002; Green, 2002; Kirk, 2004; Roberts, 1996b; Roberts & Brodie, 1992; Scheerder et al, 2006). Roberts & Brodie cites the importance of the ‘richness’ (1992, p.138) of early sport socialisation, referring to the number of different sports individuals learn to play, supporting a wide sporting repertoire, so that the whole sport career was less vulnerable. The ‘richness’ of the socialisation comes from being proficient at a number of sports, the quality of the experience, and being tied to social networks. Similarly Daley (2002) notes the importance of

⁴⁶ This is known as the ‘school sport experiences hypothesis’ (Curtis et al, 1999, p.348).

⁴⁷ Lifetime activities are activities that can be carried out individually or with one other person.

enjoying the participation experience, feeling competent, and of having a positive self-perception of participation.

Malina (2001) suggests that participation levels and patterns may change during transitions across the life span; entering school, changing schools, puberty, entering and leaving higher education, entering the workforce, marriage, having children, other change in family structure, retirement, illness, accidents and job changes. Likewise other research has focused on life transitions and their impact, with reference to life stages (Grant, 2001; Scott-Porter, 2002), life cycle (Hudson, 2000; Rapoport and Rapoport, 1975), life transitions and events (Brenan and Bleakley, 1997; Hedges, 1986; Hendry et al 1993; Raymore, 1995; Vanreusel, 1997) life span (Gibson, 2005; Scheerder et al, 2006), life course (Long, 2004, 1987) and life curve (Eichberg, 2000). Competing interests, roles and available time often result in a decrease in participation, according to the life stage e.g. leaving home, entering or increasing work commitments, attending University, marriage or homemaking with another, parenthood and change in family responsibilities, health-related problems and social factors, expectations of physical activity in retirement, the appropriateness of activity at different ages (Grant, 2001; Green, 1992; Hudson, 2000; Raymore, 1995). Key changes in participation also run parallel to changes in relationship focus (Daley, 2002; McElroy, 2002; Samadhal and Jeukbovich, 1997; Vanreusel, 1997).

Several authors explore the impact of transition on leaving school (Coakley and White, 1992; Daley, 2002; Hendry et al, 1997 among others). Hendry et al's (1997) findings confirmed the view that participation declines before leaving school and that the largest drop occurs at the minimum leaving age. There were transitional moves in participation, from adult organised, to casual peer oriented, to commercially organised activity. The decline is more marked and comes earlier for females. Young women become recreational players between 13-14 and 15-16, where as males stay longer in competitive sports. There was also evidence of a longer transition period for those continuing in full time education and this has been a finding of other studies (Coalter et al 1994; Coalter, 2004, 1999). Meanwhile during mid and later life stages concerns about physiological changes have been explored with the 'Life curve' used by Eichberg (2000) in relation to sport, this shows stages of progress, stability and decline. Phoenix and Sparkes (2007, p.14) use the model to illustrate individuals

perceptions and expectations that declining strength and other physiological change will be inevitable in the latter half of life and the impact on participation.

Authors disagree as to whether life event change necessarily meant that people would leave participation permanently. Hedges (1986) study suggested that participation may not be continuous, but also that there would be adult entry to sport, although this was largely re-entry to an activity previously participated in. Although there is also some evidence of sport take up in later life with little link to childhood activity (Hedges, 1986; Rees, 1986; Yair, 1990) and very few adults take part in the types of activities experienced as part of their secondary school education (Fairclough & Stratton, 2002; Kirk, 2004; McPhail et al, 2003; Sallis and McKenzie, 1991). Research has also shown that not all participants follow a linear pattern of involvement in sport (Hastings et al, 1989, 1995; Heuser, 2005; McQuarrie and Jackson, 1996). For example Heuser (2005) found that among women bowlers, particularly in the middle stages, their careers zigzagged between social and serious play and temporary retirement. Therefore drop out from sport at transition stages may not mean an end to participation. Coakley and White (1992); Flintoff and Scraton (2001); Ntoumanis et al. (2004) and Scheerder et al (2006) suggested transition was characterised by 'dropping into' different activities or activity settings.

Research has also considered whether transition between life stages may mean that immediate antecedents are more influential than earlier childhood activity habits (Thompson et al, 2003). Arguments have been made over whether the quality of childhood and adolescent experiences of sport may influence whether people persevere with activity through transitions (Abbott, 2006; Roberts, 1999). A number of studies of adults show that memories of youth experiences of sport and physical education continue to affect later participation (Coakley and White; Fitzpatrick and Watkinson, 2003; Hildebrand & Johnson, 2001; Huts et al, 2005 and Thompson et al, 2003). However, other studies report that any tracking effect of such experiences will be challenged and possibly eroded by transition to adult life and life events, and that participation can only be understood in the context of an individual's day to day life (Flintoff and Scraton, 2001; Green, 2002; Hedges, 1986; Hendry, 1997; Raymore, 1995; Roberts, 1999).

In summary, some of the research shows that life stage has a practical impact on the ability to participate, but also on the relevance of sport (Raymore et al, 1994). Since Scott Porter's study is one of the few to cover middle-aged individuals looking at their participation, I choose to quote in full as this exemplifies a mid-life situation for many:

The majority of respondents had families, with children's ages ranging from 2.5 years to 30 years. Family and going to work tended to be the focus of life for most. Any spare time was valued and allocated to spending with family, domestic duties, the occasional holiday and for some, following football. These men had a tendency to be stuck in set domestic patterns, and their established routines differed markedly from youth. Moreover, changes to these set patterns was sometimes considered difficult to make, however, unplanned changes to the domestic situation could also cause a re-evaluation to take place e.g. children leaving home, death of a spouse.

In general, the men perceived their life circumstances to have changed resulting in a more settled life. There was a tendency to view oneself as old, having reached middle age; almost accepting their bodies would deteriorate. However, they sometimes remembered the previous life stage with nostalgia, but tended to place it firmly in the past, i.e. feeling that it was not something that could be recaptured in the same way. There was also a sense for some of looking back to what they had and lost (including previous fitness).

(Scott-Porter, 2002, p.36)

Whilst this comment illustrates the experiences and constraints faced by individuals with low or no participation levels, it does show that decisions about participation may be linked to the relationship between the activity and self-identity, as they move into mid-life.

2.3.4.1 Strengths and weaknesses of developmental perspectives

There are a number of issues with the lifelong participation research. In themselves the studies have a number of methodological issues, linked to 'convenience sampling' and high levels of attrition in the few longitudinal studies that have been conducted (Curtis et al, 1999), plus an erring towards standardised questions. Despite this, populist claims and common sense views of an LLP effect remain and this is problematic for several reasons. In the main, studies look at the variable of childhood participation and its effect on adult participation patterns. The studies tell us little about the actual youth experience and the perception of its quality, about how people stay involved or become involved in different sports during transitions of life stages,

and the impact of the quality of the childhood sports experience on this later participation is unclear (Abbott, 2006).

Whilst there are some studies looking at the impact of past experience on the current participation of adults (Fitzpatrick and Watkinson et al, 2003; Thompson et al, 2003), much has been with the retired and older age groups or those moving into early adulthood (Raymore, 1995), there is little on middle-aged people and where there is, this focuses on men (Taylor et al, 1999). The studies also assume an idealised notion of continued and linear participation and this requires further exploration, as people may go in and out of sport (Coakley and White, 2002; Hedges, 1986; Vanreusel, 1997).

Additionally, these studies tend to examine sport or physical activity in isolation, ignoring other possible variables, yet the activity forms one part of the individual's life and leisure and a broader perspective might allow for greater understanding of participation (Green, 2002; Malina, 2001; Roberts, 1996b). More recently there has been a move away from this approach in the UK with Sport England advocating the need to look beyond energy expenditure and time spent participating, across time⁴⁸. Coakley and White (1992), Flintoff & Scraton (2001), Hendry (1993), Malina (2001) and Roberts (1999), variously note that cultural context, acceptability, meaning and value of activities are likely to be important. The importance of the context and meaning of the activity for continued participation in adult life was also highlighted and I did begin to wonder if this might be critical if life long participation was to continue? In particular Coakley & White (1992) suggest that whilst past experience of sport and life events may impact on current participation, the relevance of activity, its fit with self-identity at the particular life stage and structural effects may all be critical concerns. As decisions may be based on both the relevance of the activity participation within a sense of self-identity, and the impact of structure I now turn to examine this.

⁴⁸ (The Active People Survey, 2006; The Taking Part Survey, 2007; 'Understanding Participation' from Sport England).

2.3.5 Explanations which bridge the gap between individualistic and deterministic views

It would appear that both structural functionalist and interpretive theories have something to offer our understanding of sport participation. However, I wondered whether there were studies that could take this further? Whilst the identity focused studies offer insight into sport participation decisions, I did not discount that structural, social and cultural factors would still have an impact. There are other qualitative studies that have looked at individual experiences and meaning of sport and still examined the social context around them. This explanation of sport participation differs from the other explanations so far, being a group of studies I see similarities between, rather than a particular theoretical approach.

Some of these studies are grounded in an interactionist approach but have given greater emphasis to the influence of constraints, than other work in this domain, as well as looking at the individual's experience and identity (Coakley and White, 1992; Leith & Shaw, 1997). Coakley (2003) advocates this overall approach, suggesting that there is a need to look at the overall society and culture in which sport takes place. Sports experiences are mediated by gender, class and ethnic relations, and at the same time sport participation is tied to identity formation processes. For example Samdahl and Jekubovich (1997) in their critique of the leisure constraints framework applied a grounded analysis to their data and examined people's views of constraints and reasons for negotiating constraints, focusing therefore on structure and agency. Other studies have used an environmental or social ecological approach to examine participation, which is similarly aligned to consider the individual in their context, looking at interactions with others and social structures of society (Ainsworth et al, 2003; Raymore, 2002, Sallis & Linton, 2005). These authors note that participants have some control in their lives, but that they will face personal, cultural and environmental enablers and constraints. In turn Sport England's current research agenda (Sport England, 2005a) suggests a need to focus on people's understanding and experience of sport participation, but at the same time examine the relationship between this and social and environmental circumstances.

Of interest is also work in post structuralism and the sociology of the body and physical culture, which have bridged the structure/agency gap to some extent. The theory links the self with the social (Wright et al, 2002). The body represents and interacts with social relations, and ties the individual to society (Connell, 1995; Featherstone et al, 1991; Hargreaves, 1987). A poststructuralist approach has been used to consider sport participation, in a wider sense of engagement with physical culture (Kirk, 1997; Wright et al, 2002, 2003).⁴⁹ Wright et al, (2003) suggest that studies taking a post structural perspective will address the deficiencies of previous participation research. They comment:

In general the participation research is not designed to take into account the social, and cultural contexts, local, national and global in which young people participate in physical activity, except as variables with which to compare one group to another. They do not take into account the wide variation within groups nor the circumstances of young people's lives which may allow or prevent their enacting their desires and wants in physical activity. To not participate in this context is to be cast as deficient and delinquent; to fall short of an ideal. This ideal is often framed in relation to healthy lifestyle and performance discourses which privilege middle-class, Anglo, male ways of doing leisure and physical activity (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998).
(Wright et al, 2003, p.18)

Wright et al (2002, 2003) attempted to address these issues within a longitudinal study, looking at the physical culture experiences of three cohorts of young people for 3-5 years, looking at primary to high school, mid-high school to completion, and last years of high school onto further study or work transitions. The study looks at participation choices and significance in their lives, identity constructions and possible constraints of social class, gender and ethnicity.

Wright et al's study stands alone, as there are few studies taking this approach to consider sport participation. However, there are studies looking at body and physical culture, these include a focus on physical education, and popular culture as a discursive resource by which young people can construct physical identities (Kirk, 1999; Oliver, 2001 as key examples) and on adults (Jarvis, 2006; Markula, 1995 and Pronger, 1995 among others). Likewise research from a feminist perspective on

⁴⁹ Physical culture is understood to be 'a range of discourses concerned with maintenance, representation and regulation of the body through institutionalised forms of physical activity' (Wright et al, 2002, p.3).

physical identity development has been conducted on young girls and adolescents (Flintoff and Scraton, 2001) and women (Deem & Gilroy, 1998).

2.3.5.1 Strengths and weaknesses of structure/agency bridging studies

Overall the research studies covered in this area make an important attempt to allow individuals to explain their participation. However, whilst the research linked to sport participation attempts to bridge the gap, and reflect on both structure and agency, as with other approaches there is little about other life stages, and instead a focus on young people. Gibson notes the need:

...to recognise the interactive nature of motivation, role, life stage and social structure” in order to examine why sports tourists do what they do and this can be just as well applied to sport participation in general.

(Gibson, 2005, p.208)

The work is also often criticised for its narrow focus on culture, body and discourses. Several participation studies acknowledge the positive contribution of post-structuralism, but feel a focus entirely on culture and discourses will downplay the wider structural and institutional impacts on individual's lives (Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Scraton, 1994).

2.4. MOVING BEYOND EXISTING EXPLANATIONS OF SPORT PARTICIPATION: COMBINING STRUCTURATION, RELATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVES

In this last section I now discuss how I will build upon the previous research in this area. My theoretical framework emerged after data collection, whilst reading transcripts and during data analysis. My readings of the accounts of the study participants and of the academic literature were entwined. I came to the study from a multi-disciplinary background with limited knowledge of sociology and social psychology so the theoretical framework has been driven by the empirical data.

In summary, to overcome the limitations of other approaches to explaining sport participation, I have turned to structuration theory (Giddens, 1979, 1984) and dramaturgical theory (Goffman, 1971, 1972a). I have also turned to research outside

the field of sport participation in social psychology, in particular relational (Gilligan, 1993) and social constructivist psychology (Thomsson, 1999). In the former area in particular I have drawn upon application of relational theory within leisure, (e.g. Bedini & Phoenix, 1999ab; Gibson et al., 2002a; Herridge, et al, 2003; Thompson, 1990; 1995; Tirone & Shaw, 1997). I have also drawn upon several key studies which look at sport experiences and emphasise the need to consider these in the participant's own terms (e.g. Coakley and White, 1992; Samdahl and Jekubovich, 1997; Wright, 2002, 2003, 2006). In the next section I outline some of the key theoretical issues to explain why I have chosen this particular framework.

2.4.1 Structuration perspective

In this study I take the participants to be active in the construction of their lives, acknowledging some immediate and wider structural constraints. In turn the study will concentrate on individual's subjective understanding of self, others and society hence connecting the participants and the social structure. With these desires I was drawn to Giddens (1979, 1984) and his interpretations of Goffman's theory, initially because of his critique of structural functionalism and the relevance of his comments on self construction to the data from this study. I had used Giddens in a previous research project where I had needed to explain the development of leisure identities in adolescent girls, for the UK Guide Association (Nichols & King, 1997) and I was attracted by what Giddens had to say about identity. He decried theories that were always looking at the micro (individual) and macro (society) and called for theorists and researchers to look at the interaction and relationships within behaviour and this would offer a different approach to the largely monolithic structural approach to sport participation research (Foster et al, 2005; Theberge, 1984).

I found it useful that Giddens' draws from Goffman on ontological security, importance of social routines and social practices in the reproduction of social life hence showing the importance of social interaction. Goffman's focus on the individual, within the macro-environment mirrored the approach that my study had taken. I wanted to examine the individual's sport history, in the context of structural influences. Giddens took Goffman's work further. He used dramaturgical theory to examine the relationship between individual and society and viewed this like a map,

linking the personal to the macro system. This is important and within my study framework I wish to place a stronger emphasis on the possible influence of social structural factors and individual interpretation, on sport participation than can perhaps be derived from the more subtle approaches of Giddens and Goffman, and their lack of testing. I have shown the plethora of research which examines sport socialisation, the theoretical approach which will now be taken in contrast, will allow the individual, to be examined, as reflexive and not purely socially determined

2.4.2 Relational perspective

Further to this in the thesis I draw on the work of Gilligan (1993) and Brown and Gilligan (1992, 1993), and take a relational perspective on sport participation, because of the emerging sense of the importance of relationships in my findings. I examine the interrelationships between self, others and society, through social, relational webs. The theory centres on the principle of the "...human life as lived essentially in relationship" (Gilligan & Rogers, 1993; p.125). Relational psychology has largely been applied to women, with the observation of women's sense of self being about making and maintaining relations with others. As Gilligan comments "Thus women not only define themselves in a context of human relationship, but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care" (1993, p.17). It has however been applied to men and it is my assertion in this study that it has application to both genders within my participant group.

Research has suggested that the meaning of physicality and identity construction will be interwoven with social relationships and social ideologies (Hills, 2007). Based on the emerging importance of social relationships from my data, I have turned to relational theory when looking at the implications as to whether individual's recognise their own physical activity and sport needs, and consider they have entitlement for time on own activities. This has been asserted in a variety of work on (women's) leisure experiences.

The theory has a conceptual parallel with Giddens notion of structure and agency bridging. I wanted to look at how the participants construct and experience

themselves, other people and society in relation to sport, so in turn I consider structural, cultural and ideological constraints and enablers. Social constructions of roles and moral behaviour are analysed (Thomsson, 1999). This is important as undoubtedly culture has a prevalent impact in participation decision making.

In western societies it is difficult in some way not to construct one's identity in relation to physical activity and/or sport, even if it is in rejecting it as part of one's social and cultural life.

(Wright et al, 2003; p.19)

This complements the use of Giddens' (1979, 1984) theory, as Craib (1994) one of Giddens main critics, stresses the needs to look at the practical restrictions on the individual's actions e.g. caring role versus personal sport ambitions, which can lead to ambiguities in self-concept. Tucker (1998) suggests that Giddens tends to neglect the social role and to insufficiently acknowledge the link to social structures. He does not deal with how social systems are imposed on people and fails to consider enough, how individuals have different transformative capacities. Therefore as I examine the participant's relationship to themselves, others and society, this compensates for Giddens application. I note that these levels of relationship can not be separated but will be to some extent for the purposes of analysis and discussion in this thesis.

2.4.3 Developmental perspective

I have asserted the importance of taking a lifecycle perspective. Participation in leisure has been linked to the life course (Kelly, 1983) and whilst there is research on ageing and sport participation the understanding provided is limited, particularly on middle-age. Therefore I examine transitions between life stages and whilst other work has looked at the transition to early adulthood (Coakley & White, 1992; Raymore, 1995), I consider the move into mid-life (Partington et al, 2005; Phoenix & Sparkes 2006, 2007). In particular I consider if there is any sense of a mid-life self in relation to sport. I look at the sport role as a source of identity, and the importance of this role and see whether this might vary across the lifetime, drawing on role theory (Gibson, 2005; Levinson et al, 1978, 1996). I therefore take a retrospective approach considering whether individual's experiences, constructions and meanings of sport and physical activity have changed across time.

2.4.4 Interdisciplinary perspective

Overall, by drawing on concepts from sociology and social psychology I will be taking an interdisciplinary approach covering: from Sociology – identity, meaning, life cycle and socio-cultural factors- such as gender, age; and from Social Psychology- life span, events, and role behaviour. I had already collected my data, when coming to the literature and therefore will be discussing the sport participation experiences with the most useful insights available, whilst ensuring that there is conceptual sympathy between the different areas drawn upon. As I have already discussed most existing studies focus on the individual or the social context, incorporating both these areas allowed me to do both and to take a retrospective perspective of change across time.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Method is about what we, as researchers, do, and methodology is about our reasons for doing it that way; one is a description of the nuts and bolts we use, the other the theory behind why some nuts and bolts are more appropriate to the task at hand than others.

(Andrews, 1991 p. 42)

This chapter aims to explain both the ‘methodology’ and ‘method’ of my study. First I give an outline of the methodological issues of the study. I then describe the research methods and process I designed and implemented, and explain my reasons for this with critical and reflexive comment.

3.1 METHODOLOGY AND ISSUES

In the previous chapter I discussed the issues arising from previous literature, theoretical concepts and perspectives used to interpret the data from this study. The theoretical and methodological issues are interlinked. Therefore my research was based on the following methodological principles. 1.) it was qualitative, 2.) it emphasises the importance of listening to participants ‘voices’, their views and experiences and focusing on the subjective and lived experience of the individual (Malson, 2000) as the study is interpretative, based on a phenomenological position, 3.) it was an inductive approach and the study did not proceed from a particular theoretical perspective. I was keen to keep an open mind on what might come out of the data, and 4.) it acknowledges the role of self-reflexivity in initiating and developing the research idea and making sense of data. Next I explore each of these points.

3.1.1 Qualitative Research

Research in the field of sport participation has tended to be quantitative in nature (Foster et al, 2005; Sport England, 2005a). As I discussed in chapter 2 these types of studies can identify a picture of and some of the reasons for, participation but they

offer little explanation or understanding of participants' experiences and the subjective meanings they attribute to them. As Sport England have more recently acknowledged there is a need to improve the evidence base on sport participation, through qualitative research methods focusing on "...the meaning of an experience to participants and...exploring views and context" (2005a, p.9). Likewise the intention of my study was to conduct a qualitative study that would enable me to explore the individual's descriptions of sport participation experiences and ways in which they made sense of these. By taking a qualitative approach there is an "...emphasis on understanding through looking closely at people's worlds, actions and records" (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994; p.17) and this allows the discovery of what lies behind phenomena of which little is yet known or to delve deeper and find out novel aspects on that which we assume we know all about (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Given this last point a qualitative approach was appropriate to gather in-depth description because my initial research questions were exploratory, despite the vast number of quantitative studies on sport participation.

This approach would allow me to gather in-depth description that can harness the individual's multiple and holistic perceptions of past experiences. I wanted to concentrate on the processes surrounding sport experiences, effectively how past participation is evaluated by the individual. The qualitative model provided the answer, suited as it is, to examining complex holistic processes.

3.1.2 Focusing on subjective, lived experiences

3.1.2.1 The individual's voices

As I have suggested, attending closely to the participant's voices is central to my research. The world I wanted to analyse had already been interpreted by the people involved and it was their perspectives on this that would be my key source of knowledge. Any approach to understanding sport participation needed to encapsulate the participant's perceptions, experiences and keep these at the forefront. In order to learn about participation I would need to listen to what ordinary people say about their experiences and I wanted to hear "the informants speak for themselves" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; p.21)

Within the literature, the main bulk of research and theorising on sport participation has largely been developed from mechanistic approaches which rarely take personal accounts of sport experiences as a focus (see pp. 31-32 of chapter 2). Previous studies have often focused on the sport participation, as an outcome, with the 'experience' and 'voices' of individuals barely evident. In much of the previous empirical work the definitions of sport, parameters of the experiences to be discussed and reasons for this behaviour were defined by researchers, rather than the participants. The research participants needed to fit their view into pre-described categories and definitions. As Kuentzel and McDonald write regarding their survey work on physical activity, "This approach emphasised multiple behavioural indicators from which researchers infer the meaning and importance of an activity" (1992, p.271). Here the researcher's voice dominates in creating the meaning of the activity, whilst the participants' views are absent, like in many other approaches.

At the same time, as already noted a small, but growing body of work emphasised the importance of listening to participants 'voices', their views and experiences and focusing on the subjective and lived experience of the individual (e.g. Leith and Shaw, 1997; Thomsson, 1999; Tsang, 2000). The importance of listening to the participants and allowing them to express themselves in their own words is illustrated by Flintoff and Scraton, who say that "Interviews allowed a 'voice' for the women, and provide an opportunity to define the meaning of PE and physical activity and sport in their own words" (2001, p.6). Above all an approach was required that would give me the opportunity to get close to the research participants, to gather 'thick descriptions' (Stearn, 1998) on the perceptions and meanings, given to their sport experiences, as the focus of the research. So within my study participants would be encouraged to talk at a leisurely pace about their experiences, using their own definitions and meanings, and avoiding pre-defined categories.

From my perspective, gaining an 'insider perspective' was critical to add to work already completed from an 'outsider perspective' (Ribbens, 1994, p.34). Much of the concerns regarding the transmission of 'voices' originates from research on the lives of women and minority groups and predominantly from the perspective of feminist researchers (for example Currie, 2004; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Henderson, 1991,

1996; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2000; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993; Malson, 2000; Thomsson, 1999). However the challenge of understanding lives on the participants own terms, applies both to men and women. In the case of sport participation, a field where positivistic approaches have dominated, my aim in putting 'voices' at the centre, was to do 'good' research (Gelsthorpe, 1990; p.105). The interpretative approach and a 'voice centred relational method' of data analysis (Brown and Gilligan, 1992, 1993) which I chose to use, allowed the 'voice' of the subjects to come through (I explain more about this in later stages). Overall, as Brown and Gilligan note the role of the researcher is in "...discovering how...[the participant] speaks of [themselves] before we speak of [them]" (1992, p.27-28).

3.1.2.2 Phenomenological perspective

Tseelon compared choosing methods to languages and argued that "...methods, like language, are ideological in that they produce, not just re-produce, meaning" (1991, p.299). My research, situated with an interpretive paradigm, proceeded from a phenomenological approach, within which I take a view of the world where there are multiple realities and the important reality is what people perceive it to be (Kvale, 1996; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). Therefore I rejected the notion of an 'independently existing reality' (Sparkes, 1992; p.35). This encapsulates a focus on understanding the personal experiences from the individuals own perspective and the meaning they attribute to them (Berger and Luckman, 1991; Patton, 2002). As Evans notes:

The concern of interpretive research is to describe and explain human agency and action and the social construction of the organisational worlds that people occupy. The meanings attached to any social world have to be both discovered and understood, a project which entails getting beneath the merely observable and into the perspective and thinking of the observed.

(Evans, 1987, p.34)

Indeed the epistemological nature of the phenomenological approach emphasises knowledge as 'subjectivist' and 'interactive'. Related to this a frequent criticism of a qualitative approach is that the research process and its output lacks objectivity due to the human interaction commonly involved (see comments in Brannen, 1992; Collins, 2003; Kvale, 1996). However, from my critique of the literature and ongoing

reading on theoretical positions I had taken the view that people may experience events and themselves in relation to them, as multiple subjective realities (Jackson, 1995). From my standpoint, the subjective view of past experiences and the sense of self in relation to them, were critical in understanding sport participation. The research approach needed to encompass dynamic processes of social behaviour and meaning making, in relation to individuals' sport participation experiences, so a phenomenological approach was entirely suitable. This was in contrast to much of the positivistic orientated research in sport participation (see Foster et al, 2005 for a summary). In fact some authors note that a qualitative approach may be neither subjective nor objective, its focus being intersubjective interaction, with the relationship between the researcher and the researched at its heart (Kvale, 1996; Maykut and Morehouse, 1994; Ribbens, 1990). In fact establishing a relationship or good rapport between the researcher and researched is critical for finding knowledge (Andrews, 1991; Brown & Gilligan, 1992). This approach allowed for the role of both the researched and me, as researcher, in the data generation and analysis.

The methodology also allows for the notion that for each person there is no one single reality of sport experiences, instead there are the realities that they construct of the experience. The construction of the reality is based on interactions between personal experiences, social factors and relationships. Whilst some experiences are socially constructed, every person's experience even of the same sport participation is different to another's.

3.1.3 An inductive approach

The research involved an emergent design, and shared similarities with grounded theory approaches (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), as it was only after a number of years of part time PhD study and data collection, that the research question became clearer and my understanding of theory and the literature field began to take shape. The review of literature was started in a very general sense ahead of the study, but my reading actually began properly during my data collection and became more focused afterwards. I wanted to leave my research approach and my mind open, in order to allow for any kind of participant response. My basic initial literature scan did have an influence and I had some expectations of what the research would show. However, I

remained open to the element of surprise during my data collection, and this is illustrated in later chapters. I had almost finished my full data collection before I began to explore any theoretical framework. I took the view that theory driven research is to some extent limited, as all variables are specified ahead of time. In this instance my choice of theory reading developed partly from my formal analysis and findings of my first six interviews, where I turned to the literature as a 'stepping off point' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.51) and by the ongoing sense of issues coming out from later interviews. By coming late, by traditional research standards, to a possible theoretical framework, I avoided being 'straight jacketed' by a narrow theoretical stance. As Streat (1998) notes "...if all we have is a hammer, then the whole world looks like a nail." I therefore took a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Although I had read some literature in the field ahead of data collection and Strauss and Corbin (1998) accept that researchers come to enquiry with a background in the disciplinary literature, critically I had no preconceived notion of theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As I was new to the field of literature my reading was rudimentary at first and did not touch on social theory at that stage. This allowed me to enter the data collection fairly naively and later work from the data upwards.

3.1.4. Self – reflexivity

The importance of engaging with self-reflexivity within the research process has been highlighted, by other scholars (Fine et al, 2000; Gelsthorpe, 1990, among others). During the 1980s many sociology scholars began to view personal experience as an avenue to research (Plummer, 1983; Sparkes, 1992), not something that should be separated from the research process or hidden behind a 'facade of objectivity' (Messner, 1999 p.109). Personal experience is often the source of research problems (Strauss and Corbin, 2000) and this can be useful in developing research questions and later in making sense of the data (Andrews, 1991).

I reflected in chapter 1 on my personal experiences related to sport and how my interest in examining participation was influenced by my experiences as a participant in many sports and my career linked to the study of sport. My sporting history has been constituted by high levels and amounts of participation at times and at other

points, significant periods of little or no participation. I have demonstrated competence in some sports and not in others, and have interests in both sport and physical activity. I had a generally positive experience of sport in my childhood, but my relations with sport had shown tension at times since then. Certainly my experiences as someone with a varied sport participation background were very useful in helping me to understand some of the issues and feelings that were being relayed to me. During the research process my life also changed in other ways; my work responsibilities changed and increased, I met and subsequently married my partner and I experienced pregnancy, motherhood and maternity leave for the first time with the arrival of my daughter. This also meant that I could relate to some of the family and work issues raised by a number of participants.

Therefore it is important that I place before the reader the ‘...personal meanings, understandings and interpretations...’ (Sparkes, 1992; p.1) of sport, and my ‘...interests and political commitments’ (Evans & Penney, 1988, p.5) that have influenced the process of this research and to acknowledge these in order to avoid ‘bias’. Whilst ‘hygienic’ research (Oakley, 1981; p.58) which removes any personal influence is undesirable and implausible, it is important to consider openly and honestly the ways in which this influences design and interpretation of data (Cotterill & Letherby, 1993; Dupis, 1999). During the entire process of producing the PhD I kept a reflexive journal of my own situation in the research. I detailed my thought processes, rationales and actions, during the study. I did not keep this diary as often as I would have liked, but in itself this reflects my involvement in the research process. When I had spent considerable time working on the research and collecting data, when I was frustrated by the study and when I had new ideas were the key times that I wrote in the diary. The recordings include technical details, but also include comments on my personal reaction during interviews and analysis and at times feelings about my own sport and physical activity. These notes were useful when I came to think about how my views impacted on the study development. Even more critical, at the data analysis stage it was important to see the participants stories on their own terms and to separate out my own ‘voice’, my personal views and feelings on issues raised, and the particular methods of analysis used (Brown and Gilligan, 1992) helped with this, as I explain later.

3.2 METHODS

In this section I discuss the method design, how I selected and found my sample, how I gathered data and how I treated, interpreted and derived findings from the data. I spent 35 months collecting data, including a 6 month 1st stage¹ where I established my tools and evolving research focus, a gap for reflection and then a 19 month 2nd stage². I discuss all the stages together as stage 1, which was initially planned as a pilot, proved so fruitful that the data was used for the main study.

3.2.1 Using Interviews

Many researchers have suggested that interviews are an effective way to look at people's lived experiences and the context in which these experiences occur (Dey, 1993; Fielding, 1993; Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). As Seidman says: 'At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience' (1991, p.3). With this in mind, a semi-structured, in-depth, topical personal history interview was the chosen method for this study. I could have carried out a longitudinal study (like Hendry et al, 1993 or Vanreusel et al, 1997) in which participants were interviewed across a period of time, but I adopted a retrospective design for several reasons. Firstly I wanted to look at the individuals feelings towards their past and current experiences . Second, I wished to see how they made sense of them and related to them now. Thirdly given that longitudinal studies have been completed by others, it was also beyond the scope of a PhD study because of the length of time required for data collection. Despite my extended period of study on this PhD, a longitudinal study would not have covered any change in key life stages during the same period.

As was evident in chapter 2, there are precedents for the use of this tool to examine sport experiences (see for example Coakley and White, 1992; Flintoff and Scraton, 2001; Henderson and Ainsworth, 2000; James, 2000; Stevenson, 2002; Thompson, 1995; Thomsson, 1999, among others). It is clear, from this other research, that

¹ October 1998-February 1999.

² March 2000-September 2001.

interviews provide benefits that would be particularly helpful to my study such as; encouraging a depth of conversation, allowing sufficient length of time to build rapport and trust, and allowing for genuine curiosity to be shown, which would hopefully result in rich and thick data on thoughts and feelings (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). The interview tool also gave flexibility so that I could follow up and probe, such as on specific sport experiences and feelings towards them.

3.2.1.1 A retrospective design

I knew that an interview tool would be most appropriate to my research and I needed to find an approach which would enable me to explore individuals past experiences, the meanings of these and any sense of self in relation to them. To achieve this I decided to take a biographical approach and in order to examine the individuals past experiences a retrospective research approach was required. A variety of methods focus on individuals and their account of their lives as experiences, collectively these are referred to as life history; written accounts of an individual's life based on interviews and observations (Denzin, 1989b, Plummer, 1983).

There were 4 key methodological considerations surrounding my decision to take a life history approach. First, it offered a way to capture the participant's subjective views on sport experiences. Second, it could show the dynamics of how individuals may relate to sport and allows for them to explain how there might be contradictions and 'turning points' (Denzin, 1989a, p.17) within this. Third, it could focus on a particular aspect of life experience, in this case, sport participation. Lastly, it focuses on listening to what the respondent sees as their real experiences, rather than trying to root out 'facts'.

3.2.1.2 A biographical approach

Since the late 1970s the use of research methods that rely on the respondents recalling past events has slowly increased. (Denzin, 1989ab) There is a stronger tradition of life-history work in other disciplines, however, in the area of sport research, a number of authors have begun to make their mark (Denison, 2000; Duncan, 1988, Messner, 1999; Sparkes, 2000). This biographical work in sport has

focused either on elite and professional sports people (Sparkes, 2000; Stevenson, 1990), or on marginalized groups e.g. on gay men's experience of sports (Jarvis, 2006; Messner, 1999). There are no life history studies, to my knowledge, that focus on an age section of the general population, which is the role of this study.³

The life history approach was informed by seminal research by Thomas and Znaniecki (see Plummer, 1983, p.xiv). From this foundation many different approaches, research tools and methods of data analysis and presentation have developed. Whilst the study of written records is the most traditional, I was interested in the use of oral data sources, as life histories and stories can be constructed from interviews and conversations. (Denzin, 1989ab; Hatch and Wisneiewski, 1995) These methods are often centred on the 'long', 'open', 'life history' interview method. More recently there have been critical explorations of the way in which narrative and therefore biographical data can be 'written up' and represented (see Sparkes, 2002 for a full study of this). Whilst some have written traditional accounts from interview data, other authors have aimed to present life histories in the participants' words or may present research on their own experiences. It has also become acceptable to blur the genres of writing, with some fictional accounts presented to represent issues (Denison & Rinehart, 2000; Denzin, 1989a; Sparkes, 2002).

3.2.1.3 Subjectivity

The common thread in all life history work is "...a concern to present the naturalistic, subjective point of view of a participant" (Plummer, 1983, p.14). Life history research allows data to be gathered on an individual's inner stream and their view of their interaction with the environment (Denzin, 1989ab). The approach can be used to examine the influence of the social environment on an individual. As scholars have noted the individual builds their social self image during the life history process (Burgos, 1998, Kelly & Dickinson, 1997). This idea of an auto-biographical self originates from Mill's theory that "Social actors account for, explain and justify to

³ Although no life history studies on general sport participation are known of, there are retrospective studies focusing back from middle-age (see Abbott, 2006; Fitzpatrick & Watkinson, 2003; Thompson et al, 2003).

themselves and others what they have done, what they are doing and what they are going to do in the narrative self' (Kelly & Dickison, 1997, p.276). As the subjective viewpoint is a key feature, the closeness of life history work and the theoretical framework that I developed; structuralist and dramaturgical theory, is demonstrated (Giddens, 1979, 1984, 1992; Goffman, 1971). In parallel, the theoretical framework supports the claim that everybody is unique in their interpretation of the world.

3.2.1.4 Self-identity

At an early stage in my research design, looking at individual case studies, seemed to be critical. Allport (1942, 1962 cited in Plummer, 1983) argued in favour of such an approach, stating that each individual's life experience was highly unique and needed to be looked at for its own patterns. Each individual lives in a unique world and has influences, which one cannot generalise from the experiences of other 'similar' beings. Chinn (cited in Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995) re-iterates this, saying that the interview responses show the perspective of a specific individual, as a snapshot of their situation in culture, time and place. This echoes the need to explore the individuals' relationship with sport as openly as possible.

The methodological approach is clearly linked to the concept of identity. A life history, illustrates what people say about the past, as they reconstruct a picture of past events. It provides a picture of their sense of identity and is a "...reconstruction of aspects of life from memory dealing with individual's feelings about and interpretations of past events now" (Hitchcock, 1995, p.20). As I have pointed out I was interested in whether people had changed their sense of self in relation to sport, within a wider sense that reality and identity can be constructed and reconstructed, the life history approach offered an opportunity to look at whether participants show that change. This follows on from the premise that life experience is not a consistent flow; lives are often full of contradictions, turning points and confusions. (Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995; Plummer, 1983;) Life history is a story of the respondent's identity and neither is fixed, as they are open to interpretation and meaning making, within a dynamic process. The concept of self-identity is treated as problematic in this study and the research needs to be sensitive to the possibilities of multiple

identities and changing identities, which have no clear boundaries or simple explanations.

3.2.1.5 Topical life histories

The research aimed to gather personal experience histories and in this sense, it is based on a topical life history approach. In order to address the research question, focus on a particular aspect of this experience; sport, was required. The personal histories are “Like snapshots, they are not panorama but partial views.” (Bellaby, 1991, p.20). However, the research approach would allow me to examine this experience, in the context of the participant’s life. In particular I wanted to know if ‘epiphanies’ might occur within sport experience, or whether other life ‘turning points’ might influence sport identity (Denzin, 1989a). Denzin refers to ephiphanies as points of crisis and challenge, as “...interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people’s lives” (p.7) As these occurrences might cause change to the meaning structure, the research approach needed to look retrospectively at events and allow participants to demonstrate changes in identity. At these key turning points individuals may have re-examined areas of their life.

3.2.1.6 The methodological approach adopted in the life histories

There has been considerable concern expressed over the representativeness and reliability of life history approaches (Hitchcock, 1995; Miller 2000). Given this context positioning the approach taken is important. Miller contends that three approaches to biographical research can be adopted; realist, neo-positivist or narrative, noting also that the three approaches can overlap in practice.⁴ Initially when I commenced the interviewing for this study I was focused on finding the participants’ reality by recording what I believed would be an authentic reflection of individual’s constructions of self-identity, in relation to sport activities. I realise in hindsight that this initial research approach was a realist one. The realist approach is

⁴ The approaches used by Miller (2000, p.13) are briefly defined as follows: 1.) the realist approach is inductive, often linked to grounded theory, usually unfocused interviews form the data source and reality is deemed to be the respondents perspectives; 2.) the neo-positivist approach is deductive, linked to theory testing and focused interviews and there is a focus on the hermeneutic interplay between actor and structure; 3.) the narrative approach is an ongoing, situational project, with reality created by the interplay between interviewer and interviewee.

characterised by induction and clearly has links to grounded theory. My initial interviews were very open, allowing the participants to set the focus on the sport and physical activity experiences they wished to talk about. I was also concerned by possible interview effects, so I took a traditional neutral questioning approach where I placed the emphasis on listening to the participants' experiences rather than sharing my own. At this stage I considered reliability to be important, wanting to make sure that my participants' views were uncontaminated.

However, with hindsight I realised that my approach changed during the study. I was actually moving towards a narrative approach. At a simple level moving away from an unfocused approach to using an interview guide for the latter 14 interviews, was an initial indication. This was in response to the interviewees' desire for greater structure and my wish to explore some specific areas (discussed in 3.2.3.1). Most critically though, it was my increasing realisation of the joint roles of interviewee and interviewer, in constructing the reality that the participants told, that re-positioned my approach. I realise now that I spent considerable time pondering my approach. For example, I explored the possible social desirability interview effects when I presented a conference paper (King et al, 2002). This paper focused on the issues surrounding the quest for truth and this developed my perspective on the reality that was being generated during interviews. In fact I now realised that the reality was actively constructed during the interviews.

The approach I eventually took fits most clearly the narrative label but it is important to acknowledge that it did not sit neatly with all of the criteria of this approach, as outlined by Miller (2000, p.12-14). I was influenced by realist insights into interview dynamics in my desire to neutralise the setting and questions asked, as a result of previous research training. Miller (p.101) acknowledges that one can adopt the narrative approach but still maintain that the interviewer and interviewee should keep their personal distance. However, my approach began to change during the research process to more closely resemble the narrative approach. In fact after completing my interviews it was whilst I considered my desire to control interview effects as an ideal that I began to realise that this was not possible. After all "What constitutes reality will be dependent upon the temporary joint perceptions generated by the interaction of social actors" (Miller, 2000, p.17). During the interviews as I note

later, participants are responding to my stimulation and therefore it may be that sport and physical activity experiences are under or over-described. For example a respondent may feel a pressure to demonstrate 'continuity' in their sport participation. However, in this study the life history presented was taken on face value, as the respondent's subjective experience constructed in the interview situation. By the data analysis stage (discussed later in this chapter) my focus on recording both the story told and my reaction to this showed my desire to show the participants voices, but to acknowledge my personal reaction to and possible influence on their story as part of the research process which can not be isolated or removed.

In the narrative perspective reality is seen as 'situational and fluid' (Miller, p.13). This matches my perspective on the fluid construction of meaning and identity, which I suggest is actively constructed and reconstructed over time. Identity development does involve reinterpreting past experiences in order to move on, as self claims may involve revising past interpretations of events over time (Hatch and Wiseneiewski; 1995, Plummer, 1983; Hjelle and Ziegler, 1981). Reasons that respondents give for actions now, will not necessarily be the same as those they would have given at the time or at any other since then. As identity changes so might perceptions of past events and therefore the interview gives an insight into the situational reality that is ongoing at the time. Others have also commented that people may change their interpretation of the past to fit what they believe now (Denzin, 1989a).

...The individual may fabricate and insert events...to harmonise the remembered with the reinterpreted past...subjectively he is not telling lies about the past but bringing it in line with the truth that, necessarily embraces both present and past.

(Berger & Luckman, 1991, p.180)

Overall, as with my initial realist approach I was looking for a subjective account not an objective, positivistic viewpoint of truth. My desire was to learn how the participants' perceived sport and PA within their own world and to discover what aspects of that experience were significant to them. Critically it is in the interplay between the participants and me as interviewer that the reality presented in this study

is constructed. In this sense the participants were giving their stories, of their life history, which Miller (p.139) refers to as ‘a *depiction* of the events of a lifetime’.

3.2.2 Sample

I chose to focus on UK adults between 38-43 years of age, who had varying sport and physical activity experiences. Critically the last chapters demonstrated that there is a lack of research on the sport participation experiences of the mid-life age group. At the time of my data collection I was focusing on the role that physical education would play in affecting participation in sport later in life. Those at this age and educated within the UK would have experienced school P.E., after it became a more recognisable and standard subject (Kane, 1974). Later, this has become less important within the overall research question. However, this age group had other advantages, by ensuring that they had passed through almost two decades after their compulsory schooling, it allowed for an examination of non-compulsory sport experiences and a longer period in which change could have occurred. Also, during the pilot stage I became aware that mid-life seemed to be a ‘turning’ point for some participants and they considered that this started as they ‘turned 40 years of age’. Research also shows that mid-life may be a time for life and activity re-considerations (Blaikie, 1999; Partington et al, 2005).

3.2.2.1 Finding the Sample: First stage (6 interviews)

The sample for the initial ‘first stage’ interviews was located by snowball sampling (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981) through colleagues, friends and family who were aware of my research and who knew someone who might wish to participate. I let my contacts know that I sought individuals who were aged between 38-43 years of age, who had some experiences of sport and physical activity and had been educated in the state school system within the UK. This last criteria relates to the fact that, when I first began the research, I had intended to look at the impact of national curriculum policy from the time when they were at school. However, after completing the first few interviews my research changed direction. I began to realise that whilst school sport experiences had an important impact on later participation

and understanding of sport, the meaning, value and relevance of the activity and sport identity relevance changed over time. This request via friends brought forward 10 names of people who were willing to participate, from whom I interviewed six.

3.2.2.2 Finding the Sample: Second stage (10 interviews)

For the second stage of the interviews I used network sampling, by using the University of Northumbria Personnel database, where I was employed. I did this by sending a letter to all members of staff of the University who were aged between 38-43 years of age. Snowball sampling had been the key to obtaining an initial sample for the first 6 interviews as people were encouraged to take part by their friends. Although sport participation may not be initially perceived to be a sensitive issue, I did want to encourage people who were 'not interested in sport', as much as those who were, and I was aware that they may have had negative experiences. In addition I wanted to conduct in-depth interviews of 2-3.5 hours in length and I was worried that people would not be willing to give up such an amount of time. Snowball sampling was a useful way to encourage participation through social ties. However, it has been criticised as a method that tends to generate homogenous samples (Gerson, 1985; Lee, 1993). My first six participants resulted in a sample that represented different educational and work backgrounds because I spoke to a diverse range of family, friends and colleagues across the UK. However if I continued with snowball sampling it would have led to a narrowing sample group, with my social circle particularly at the time of studying and working fulltime being fairly compact. In contrast network sampling offered the opportunity to contact a wide range of people in one go,⁵ from different gender, work and education backgrounds, although all in employment and to offer a friendly approach as a fellow colleague to encourage people.

The kind agreement of the Personnel department to distribute letters via their database gave a potential population of 461 staff when a mail out was sent out on the 28th January 2000.⁶ The break-down of staff who were contacted and those who

⁵ An important factor as I collected data whilst working full time and was therefore time poor.

⁶ Private Envelopes were attached to their next monthly pay slip and sent to their work address. A home address mail out was sent to 56 casual members of staff.

responded to my request for interview by the end of February 2000 are detailed in table 4, appendix A.

On the 28th January 2000 the letter was sent out by Human Resources attached to each persons wage slip. Prior to the mail out I prepared an advert, for the University staff newsletter, explaining that staff would be receiving letters and encouraging them to respond to my request for participants.

The main words, which I used in the letter to recruit potential participants, were:

For my PhD research I am interested in talking to people between the ages of 38-43 about their experience of sport and physical activity. The Personnel Department has agreed to send this letter out to all staff between these ages, so hopefully this includes you. Would you be interested in taking part in my study? I would like to talk to both participants and non-participants. You don't have to be interested in sport or active.

The letter sent out (see appendix B) was accompanied by a detachable details form and free-post envelope. I invited interested people to contact me to talk about the research and ask any questions they might have⁷. The letter was designed to be friendly and to suggest that people might enjoy the interview process, as they would be giving up their personal time. I started by stating that I worked at the University, as I thought this might encourage more support for the research (at the time I had received a number of requests to take part in student research). I considered that by distinguishing myself as staff, I might avoid being associated with the saturation in students requests for participants. I had also been involved in a consultancy project for University Sports Facilities, which had involved setting up focus group interviews with staff, both users and non-users. Many of the participants had been very open about previous sport experiences and I was happy for them to be encouraged to take part in the knowledge that the interviewer was the same person. In addition, I stressed that non-sport participants were encouraged to take part and used the phrase 'physical activity', in addition to sport as this would broaden out possible activities. I provided some basic details on the practicalities of the interviews, but stressed that these were negotiable.

⁷ The response sheet requested their contact details, age, job title, and best days/times for contact. and willingness to be interviewed or receive further information.

The approach via direct letter proved effective as over a period of a month, 97 people (52 females and 45 males) volunteered to take part in the study. I was pleased with the response rate as I had anticipated that I would need to cajole people into taking part in the study and giving up their time. A number of staff also wrote notes on the form, providing reasons for wanting to take part in the study. For some they had negative past experiences or they had positive experiences, but no longer took part in sport. It was apparent that for some the letter had caused them to reflect on their personal experiences of sport. In order to select a sample, I rejected 12 because of practical access or interview commitment issues. Some were permanently based too far away from the University or stated that they were only available if I was 'desperate for participants'.

In the second stage of the study all the volunteers fell within 38-43 years of age and because of the narrow age band I did not use age as a basis for stratification, I did use other criteria to select a purposive sample (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). I stratified the sample of the remaining 85 volunteers on the basis of gender and occupation. I used 2 occupation categories derived from a list provided by the University.

- (A.) Ancillary e.g. cleaning, estates and support staff (1 female chosen) and Administration and Technical (4 chosen: 2 females, 2 males),
- (B.) Teaching and Research (4 chosen: 1 male Principle Lecturer, 1 female and 1 male Senior Lecturer, 1 female Lecturer) and Management (1 male Director chosen).

I randomly selected an equal number of males and females from each occupation category, also ensuring that the same job role was not represented more than once within each gender group. I used the employment categories to aim loosely for some breadth of educational backgrounds. The resulting sample selected on gender and occupation, were spread across the age band. Potential participants were not asked to specify current or previous sport/physical activity participation ahead of the interview, on the recruitment form, as I deliberately wanted to make sure that those with less adult 'sport', or with more physical activity, experiences would feel encouraged to take part. Whilst I did not purposefully select the sample to allow for

any sense of rigorous comparison, the eventual sample did cover respondents from a variety of physical education experiences, with individuals with:

- negative P.E. experience, none/low current sport participation
- negative P.E. experience, current sport participation
- positive P.E. experience, none/low current sport participation, and
- positive P.E. experience, current sport participation.

In order to ensure random selection I picked individuals randomly from each occupational set and then telephoned or emailed to try and arrange an interview. If a mutually convenient time could not be arranged for interview, within one-two months of the original contact, I moved onto the next individual in that category.

3.2.2.3 Overall sample from stage 1 and 2

The sample is composed of 16 British individuals (8 male, 8 female), who are between 38-43 years of age (with one exception, a 35 year old).⁸ Twelve live and work in Tyne and Wear, 1 in Flintshire and 3 in Avon. Thirteen were married and 3 were single (1 divorced). Twelve had children. The sample represents a range of occupations but predominantly within Higher Education, with others working within other occupations including administration, skilled and unskilled manual work and professional. Eleven worked FT and 5 PT (all the PT were female, which does mean that only 3 of the females in the sample worked FT). In order to preserve anonymity of my sample (given that they work at the institution that the study is completed at) I will not give any further criteria details of the participants in my study (a list of pseudonyms is provided in appendix C).

It should be noted that whilst network sampling garnered a large response, the sample of people who were willing and available to be interviewed for my research were predominantly middle class with 81 % (n = 13) of the sample having educational qualifications (academic or technical), beyond secondary school and all were employed. There was also a higher educational level for the male participants, 6

⁸ I did interview one individual (Rob) who fell below the age parameters I originally desired, this was after I had attempted to set up interviews with several others whose names had been put forward in my initial snowballing but could not find a mutually convenient time. I interviewed two of Rob's contacts, during a weekend visit to complete this research elsewhere in the UK and so I included Rob in the sample, as a third interview.

out of 8 males educated to degree level or above, but only 3 out of 8 females). In addition I did not seek information on ethnic background but from observation and interview data, I deduced that all of my sample participants were white, British citizens. I acknowledge that there are issues of class, race and disability which may have been raised within a different sample group, from wider sampling of diverse sources. I did not ask for these details ahead of the interviews and did not use them for selecting the sample. I was interested in the meanings and processes of sport and physical activity participation for middle aged women and men. My objective was to find a self-selected sample of individuals rather than to seek a representative sample of the wider population. The representativeness of the sample was therefore not a primary concern because the study was designed to be small-scale and exploratory, in order to look at voices which have been previously ignored in the predominantly mechanistic approaches taken to examining sport and physical activity participation.

Background sport and physical activity summaries of the participants are introduced in table 5 below and provides descriptive context for the discussion of participation and behaviour in chapters 4 to 6.

Table 5: Participant sport and physical activity profiles

Pseudonym	Age	Brief profile
Andy	41	Andy is a competitive footballer, who was an active football and rugby player in his youth. He focused on rugby during his later youth years, but sustained an injury in his final year at University which ended his involvement for a season. On leaving University he continued playing rugby and football. He has also coached youth rugby sides and his own children's football teams. Just past his mid 30s he sustained several injuries which required an operation and since then he ceased playing rugby but continued with football. He currently plays for an over-40s football team who play at a 'good standard' and a staff team.
Ben	38	Ben walks and swims. In his youth he played a range of sports, but did not always feel that he was competent in these. In his adult life he became involved in boxing, including starting and running a club, but ceased this in his 30s.
Clare	40	Clare had neutral feelings towards school sport and physical education, but always participated in the latter. In her 20s she did not take part in sport and physical activity, but after the birth of her second child she started recreational walking with her family and then a few

Table 5 (continued)

		years later took up fitness classes. Her participation is not consistent, with bouts of participation for the length of fitness class series and periods of time when she is not participating regularly. She always walks to work and for daily activities.
Craig	39	Craig completes some home based exercises and runs during his vacation time, but is relatively physically inactive, compared to his successful amateur rugby career (which he ended about 6 years ago). During University he played club rugby and University football. During his 20s he was often the 'star player' for the football teams he played for. He returned to rugby in his late 20s but could not sustain the training he felt was necessary. He stopped playing competitive sport in his early 30s
Emma	43	Emma is a swimmer and intermittent fitness class attender, who represented her school at basketball, hockey and rounders. She has enjoyed all the sport and physical activity she has participated in, but the amount of participation has dropped in recent years.
Heather	41	Heather is an avid swimmer, and regular participant in fitness conditioning in a gym throughout her adult life, she also hill walks and occasionally ski's. She did not enjoy sport in her childhood but did like active and outdoor play and exploration.
Jackie	40	Jackie exercises at a health and fitness club and walks outdoors. In her youth she tried a range of activities, but did not participate in many on a regular basis beyond Physical Education, with the exception of recreational swimming and hockey where she played for her school team when chosen, but did note that she was eventually dropped.
Jane	42	Jane enjoyed athletics, tennis and netball at school, but dropped out in her teenage years due to bullying. Outside school she enjoyed outdoor activities and dance, through involvement in a uniformed youth organisation. In adult life, she has participated in dance exercise classes, yoga, cycling and running, regularly in her 20s and then intermittently in her 30s. Two years ago she was advised not to exercise by her doctor because of a back problem.
John	39	John is an avid runner, who worked out at the gym, participated in competitive five-a-side football and played recreational tennis. He had negative experiences of sport in his childhood but had been involved in a range of sports in school, and regular informal football play outside.
Kate	41	Kate is an avid dance and yoga class participant, recreational cyclist and who hill walks and does water sports with her family. She was physically active outdoors as a child, but detested school PE and sport, apart from gymnastics.

Table 5 (continued)

Keith	38	Keith is an avid footballer and runner, who had been active in many sports throughout his life. He is an avid competitive footballer and runs on a regular basis. He has tried most sports in his life, and during his youth competed in football, tennis and running, and took trials for a professional club.
Penny	43	Penny intermittently hill walks, swims and attends keep-fit classes. Penny participated in little sport in her youth, feeling uncomfortable with her ability levels. However, she was active in hill walking which she took part in through a uniformed youth organisation.
Peter	40	Peter is an avid hill walker, runner and competitive off shore sailor, but did not enjoy school sport. On leaving school he was not involved in any sport, but was heavily involved in motor biking with friends. In his early 20s he started running on the encouragement of a friend. His involvement in a military reserve force led to participation in a variety of sports and physical activities. He became involved in off-shore racing in his late 20s, but had been involved in sailing at school and then on leaving school when working briefly as a fisherman. He gained qualifications at Nautical college.
Phil	41	Phil is a competitive road and track runner who has won several races and titles in his veteran age group. As a child he did not enjoy football and rugby but when he gained recognition for his running ability his confidence grew and he enjoyed cricket, table tennis and gym work in his youth. In his early adult years he was involved in weightlifting, but for some time in his mid-20s he describes himself as fairly inactive, only cycling and swimming occasionally. In his 30s he started running again.
Rachel	38	Rachel exercised at the gym and had tried some activities, golf, swimming and cycling and a range of keep fit and gym classes during her adult life. In her childhood she disliked sport but did participate in some, but preferred dance activities.
Rob	35	Rob is an avid runner who has competed in 10k and half-marathon road races during his adult life, but describes hating and avoiding sport in his youth. During his 20s he also played squash and swam on a regular basis.

3.2.3 Developing the Research tools

3.2.3.1 Learning from my initial interviews

As I had completed interviews before for several research projects I felt fairly comfortable with the process. There were only two occasions within two interviews when I felt uncomfortable and in each case the participant did seem relaxed despite this. So from this point of view the first set of interviews did not need to act as a practice ground in the way a pilot usually would, but I did pay attention and adapt to feedback. Initially, in the first interviews an open, life history interview style was used, to ensure that the participant was able to frame their reminiscences as they wished. Questions were very open and the interview was split mainly between child and adult life. I started the interviews with an open invitation, ‘I’d like to talk to you about participation in sport and physical activities throughout your life so far. What I’d like to get from you is your life history in relation to those activities...’ The interview schedule⁹ then covered the following domains:

- Meaning of and interests in Sport ¹⁰
- Identification of self in relation to sport
- Memories of sport and physical activity (organised and outside of school)
- Feelings about the activities
- Constraints and enablers (including probing on the influence of life events)
- Future participation intentions
- Perception of the influence and significance of sport

I started off each interview with a section of introductory questions on interest in, meaning and view of self in relation to sport, for example I began with are you interested in sport? I then moved into the main section of the interview where I started off each sub-section on childhood, school, after childhood, with the general question ‘What memories of sport and physical activity do you have?’ This allowed the participant to set the agenda and explain what were their important experiences

⁹ See appendix D for final interview guide used from interview 3 onwards.

¹⁰ Each domain included a few general questions and prompts. The domains were used to cover childhood, adult and present times.

and feelings. At this stage I did not ask ‘why’ questions, beyond asking them to tell me about memories and involvement, as “...’why’ questions can be perceived as requests for rationalisations and can render feelings of prejudgement and prompt defensive responses” (Dale, 1996; p.313). Instead I encouraged a focus on the first person experience. When I was sure they had exhausted their coverage on their memories, I did turn to other questions to prompt or achieve clarification on areas which they might not have mentioned or explained little of. In the follow up’s I covered within all sub-sections; description of the activity, feelings on this, preferred activities, enjoyment, positive or negative memories, ability to take part in all activity desired, other spare time activity, plus additionally in the school section; influence of these activities on the individual, purpose for and of physical education, in the adult life section; the experience of take up or discontinuation of particular sport and physical activities, sports consumption experiences, impact of life events, comparison of child and adult participation, and in the current and future section; experiences and intentions. Latterly when they felt they had said all they wanted to say in the interview I ended with some questions on clarification of anything they had mentioned that I did not understand, I made sure to note that these were additional questions led by me. I then ended with evaluatory questions which were:

- In adult life what influence would you say sport and physical activity has had on you?
- How would you evaluate how important sport and physical activity has been, within your life?
- How important is it now?
- Do you have any other memories/comments on sport and physical activity that you’d like to share with me?

(See appendix E for further detail on the interview tool).

3.2.3.2 Helping the participant tell their story: introducing a ‘Time line’ tool

In the first two interviews, both participants spent time thinking through their sport history and both suggested at the end of the interview that they felt they had repeated

themselves and asked on occasion 'have I told you this already'. So to alleviate the stress of trying to remember and then reflect, and to help the interviewees structure their own recollections I introduced a 'timeline' tool from interview 3. In the first two interviews I had used life stages as prompts, to give the participants some direction to their reminiscences e.g. prompting with primary, junior, high school, leaving school, finding a job, changing relationships etcetera. However, it seemed to be difficult for a person without many life changes, to see their life in stages (for example, those who have maintained the same job and had no significant relationships). So from interview 3 a timeline tool was introduced which allowed them to record life events, and sport and physical activity involvement, encouraging them to show their own picture of this. The design was adapted from a method used by the Sports Council to examine leisure activities (Hedges , 1986). It is essentially a basic recording document, a year chart used to frame recollections and the structure of the subjects history telling. This aids the process of reminiscence and can give the interviewee a self-written guide to talk from (see appendix E for further detail on the timeline tool design and use).

3.2.4 Interview process – where, when and how?

In total 16 interviews and 'timelines' were conducted and they took place between October 1998- November 1999 (1st stage) and March 2000-September 2001 (2nd stage). As I interviewed across a lengthy period I posted another notice in the Staff Newsletter in September 2000, to remind those staff who had responded to my initial request, of the research, as completing the interviews was taking longer than expected. The participants were interviewed once and on average interviews lasted 2.5 hours, varying from 1.5 hours to 3.5 hours, taking place in the interviewees own house or on some occasions at the University. All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, with transcripts sent to participants inviting comments on accuracy or clarification (see appendix E for further details on the interview process and style).

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

At the end of my data analysis I had 16 interview transcripts and field notes, plus timelines for 14 of the participants. For 3 transcripts I had received notes from participants and I annotated or amended the transcript accordingly. I also integrated my field notes on body language and facial expressions and my thoughts on the flow of the interview into the transcripts. My notes for each participant included observations on other communication with each participant; emails, letters and phone calls in the process of setting up the interview. In my analysis I focused mainly on the content of 'what was said', but in order to understand how the participants actually felt about sport participation I paid attention to form i.e. 'how it was said' (Brannen, 1988).

3.3.1 Methods of analysis: CAQDAS to VCR

I used two methods to analyse the data. During the first data collection stage (the first 6 interviews) I used a cut and paste method by utilising a computer aided qualitative analysis (CAQDAS) for a quicker process of coding data and extracting themes (see appendix E for a fuller discussion). However, I was dissatisfied with this method of analysis, so for the remaining 10 interviews I have used Brown and Gilligan's (1992, 1993) 'voice centred relational method' of analysis and I then used a process of coding to extract themes from the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). There were a number of 'twists' and 'turns' in my data analysis process and this reflects how data analysis is 'a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating process...' (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.150).

I had become aware of the limitations of CAQDAS and I was also concerned that any cut and paste method took me away from the sense of a story of participation, as Reismann noted "...it is precisely because of their subjectivity- their rootedness in time, place and personal experience, in their perspective-ridden character that we value them" (1993, p.5). I had also been drawn towards other methods of analysis because of my theoretical framework. I was concerned that the individual voices might not be heard, by the time I had analysed the data and presented it. By chance a key word search on qualitative data analysis on the world wide web, brought up

several useful articles, one in particular which focused on ‘voice in qualitative data analysis’ (Doucet & Mauthner, 1998) caught my attention. The article considered the issues of ‘reflexivity, power, voice and authority’ (p.1) in the data analysis stage. The authors addressed a method used to analyse verbatim transcripts of in-depth interviews from their own doctoral studies. This was an adaptation of the voice centred (or sensitive) relational method (VCR) of data analysis, developed by Brown and Gilligan (1992, 1993). I was immediately attracted by this method with its focus on interdependent self, in social, relational webs. There was a conceptual parallel with Giddens (1979, 1984) understanding of the duality of social structure and human agency, and emphases on self and identity as social interactive practices (Goffman, 1971). Brown & Gilligan highlight 4 critical questions to consider when analysing data “(1) Who is speaking? (2) In what body? (3) Telling what story about relationship- from whose perspective or from what vantage point? (4) In what societal and cultural frameworks?” (1992, p.21). Brown & Gilligan’s method of analysis is conducted through four staged readings of their transcripts and Mauthner and Doucet described a further two stages

1. “Listen to the story”, “...reflect on ourselves...” (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p.27).

Reading for the plot and for the researcher’s responses to the narrative. (Listening to the tape, reading the transcript: a.) read for the plot/story- main events, characters, sub-plots, images, contradictions (individual and structural focus) b.) the researcher notes their emotional and intellectual response to this person (personal, political, theoretical influences) (this brings into the open my response for the reader).

2. “Listen for self” (1992, p.27).

Reading for the voice of the ‘I’ (Identifying where the participant uses personal pronouns, this can be used to signal how the respondent perceives and experiences themselves).

3. “...attend to the ways people talk about relationships...” (1992, p.29).

Reading for description and comments on social relationships and the way in which these might be enabling or constraining

4. “...attuned to the ways in which institutionalised restraints and cultural norms and values become moral voices...” (1992, p.29).

Reading for how the participant experiences societal and cultural frameworks

5. Writing up the researchers thoughts on the transcripts as a case study
6. Presenting case studies to a research group

My decision to use VCR was influenced by my theoretical position which I had come to during my last 10 interviews and also my personal political view of wanting everyone to be represented. In essence I wanted to make sure that I was operationalising my qualitative principles, by listening fully to the participant, and understanding their lives how they do, in and on their own terms, through recording their words and my interpretations (Brown & Gilligan, 1993, p.15). In common with a grounded theory approach to research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), the method attempts to draw findings and theoretical insights by concentrating in detail on the data alone initially (see appendix E for further detail on the decision to use the VCR method).

For my study I completed four readings of the transcripts (1-4 above), I also used basic computer text search tools to look at where the individual referred to self in relationship to itself, others and society. Meetings with my supervisory team, to discuss case studies, replaced stage 5 and 6 but I acknowledge that if a suitable research forum had been available to discuss my thoughts from the VCR it would have been very useful. The voice relational method was used to create typologies and themes. The individual's whole transcript was examined as a whole several times to look at their perception of sport participation and identity in their life. During reading one I also paid attention to the time line of the individual, adding notes where this differed to what was said in the interview. I was concerned by the method being time and labour intensive and it certainly was a lengthy process of analysis, with several months spent on the readings of each individual participant's transcript. This proved an invaluable way to get into the data. Mauthner and Doucet (1998) felt they could only spend intensive time on 10 of the scripts, to make the rest of the data more manageable. They had identified themes from the individual case studies and they broke the rest of the data up into themes and sub-themes with manual or CAQDAS methods. I did not want to return to a CAQDAS method and instead completed the readings in full for the last 10 interviews. I did not complete VCR on the initial 6 interviews because of time practicalities and I acknowledge that this could have been useful. I had already created a manual coding system where I had come up with loose

categories and ideas of themes after spending much time reading and re-reading the first 6. When I had finished the VCR readings, I moved onto generate the final themes of the study.

3.3.2 Generation of themes

I now had 16 transcripts, 14 of which had an additional timeline and for 10 of these I had a comprehensive set of notes on the 4 VCR readings I had completed and for the 6 others a set of notes on codes, categories and theme ideas. I moved onto look at building up themes from all the data.

The process of coding I used was loosely based on open, axial and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). I say loosely because I had already completed one set of coding on the first six interviews and then intensive readings and development of ideas from my VCR of the last 10. Looking back at the transcripts and my analysis notes, I had already produced a number of codes from the VCR readings and had notes on emerging themes from the readings, so I created codes from these. I then used 'Mind-mapping' computer software programme so that I was able to create coding sheets (making notes on which transcripts or sets of notes the codes were derived from). These processes led to a loosely made list of codes and denoted where similar statements or different statements on the same issue were grouped, a label was attached to these which aimed to describe the content.

I then further refined, clarified and grouped these concepts using axial coding within each of the codes. I then spent some time writing up notes on these codes, illustrating with examples and presenting these to my supervisor and other colleagues for discussion. After discussion I returned to my coding sheets and used selective coding to look at relationships between existing categories. I carried onto until there were no new codes emerging and I felt that relationships between themes and sub-themes were established, a point of 'theoretical saturation' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Throughout these stages, I employed 'constant comparison' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) of data to look at similarities and differences within and across interviews. I found that my detailed readings helped me to see, similarities and differences by thinking about the participants as whole people.

Through this lengthy analysis period one major theme emerged, which focused on the construction of sport and sport participation. This macro theme was based on, two related sub-themes. The first sub-theme relates to sport and physical activity's meaning and value for the participants. This is about meaning and definition of sport and the influence of this on reasons for participation or non-participation and the changes in this over the life course. The second sub-theme is about self-definition in relation to sport and physical activity. This theme explores the various ways in which the individuals experience and associate with sport. It concerns the way in which identification with sport and physical activity changes across the life course and considers the impact of relationships as both empowering and constraining. It covers the ways in which the individuals' participation is influenced by the ageing process, by looking at the ways in which middle age, adult responsibilities and the ageing body is considered, and the use of this notion, as a strategy for reducing participation or participation as resistance to this.

Therefore the analysis might appear to be a neat process but it is actually difficult to explain the messiness of the process at this stage or to be absolutely clear how I identified the codes and the patterns, as I kept an open mind and found these through my readings. Despite keeping a research diary it is far easier to explain the latter stages of data analysis, where I had finally established key themes and was just looking back at transcripts for examples to illustrate these. Before this the whole process of coding and generating themes was more intuitive and implicit, the VCR provided a framework for my analysis, but after this I still spent a great deal of time 'thinking', going back to the transcripts, reading and re-reading to come up with some themes. I carried transcript and multiple reading sets with me on journeys and many insights came then, plus my ideas appeared at odd times of the day when my mind had free range e.g. driving, in the gym. Overall the data analysis stage was not linear, as many researchers expect at the start of a study, as I moved from coding to VCR, back to coding (Mellor, 2001).

3.4 SELF-REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

I now move onto consider the ethical and social considerations of the study design. I end by considering the research strength.

3.4.1 Power relations

Thus, data analysis presents researchers with the challenge of keeping respondents' voices and perspectives alive, while at the same time recognizing the researcher's role in shaping the research process and product.

(Doucet & Mauthner, 1998, p.1-2)

Given that I wanted to elicit the participants' own accounts of their sport participation, the relative power balance between the participants and myself, as researcher needs to be considered. There has been considerable debate over the need to create a more equitable power relationship within interviews (Harding, 1987, Mies, 1983, Oakley, 1981). As I acknowledged earlier in this chapter my position as a white, middle class, female, academic and sport participant will have an impact on the research. If there is not a match of characteristics e.g. age, sex and race, educational, occupational background between interviewer and respondent, there may be issues with access and understanding of those under the research gaze. However, as I have already elaborated I certainly felt that a match on some criteria helped me relate to the participants experiences. Inevitably as I had control over the study design and process I was in position of greater power. Therefore I worked hard to ensure that respondents would feel comfortable and in control at all stages of the research; for example by my demeanour and introduction as a student researcher and where relevant as a fellow staff member; by trying to locate interviews in informal settings, by explaining that participants could withdraw at any time, and by encouraging them to tell their individual stories. Through self-reflexivity I acknowledge the role personal biography played right through the research process and I wanted to ensure that I redressed any power imbalance. In the interviews it was important to avoid an authority role. I tried to make the interviews relaxed and informal and encouraged them to progress at their own speed. I stressed that I wanted to hear their stories and as I have noted elsewhere I did not attempt to share my

experiences with the interviewees fully during the interview in order to give greatest precedence to their experiences.

I was concerned about possible social desirability influences on the stories and responses given. Denzin (1989a) expressed concerns over the subject's desire to show a success story and likewise this was highlighted by Goffman's (1972b, 1971) notion of preserving 'face'. The participant knows it will be a fleeting meeting and that they are not likely to see the interviewer again, so they may try to present themselves in the 'best possible light', stating that they 'go to the gym and work out hard', if they perceive this to be of value! They may emphasise or create traits and attributes, which are desirable to the dominant culture. In order to avoid this effect I considered the key issues; the interviewees perceived view of the interview and research audience (Sparkes, 1999) and the interview process and context (Riessman, 1993). Initially what I told the interviewees about my research and myself, ahead of the research, would have a key influence on how they perceived the research requirements. As Malson (2000) illustrates:

The interviewer is concerned to elicit the interviewee's talk about the research topic...and to provide a facilitating environment for the participant to tell her story. The agenda of the interviewee is less clear, but is likely to include a plausible account that '*makes sense*' of herself; that is comprehensible to the listener and that is orientated in some way to the researcher's agenda.

(Malson, 2000, p.157)

To encourage them to see that I had an 'open' agenda, where their sport participation and non-participation were in focus, I stressed to the interviewees that I was interested in their experiences and feelings about sport and I stress, *physical activity* participation and elaborated that I was interested in views of non-participants as well. My attempts to engage the participant in conversation in a trusting and comfortable environment may have further helped avoid any likelihood of interviewee biases. I tried to interview in informal settings, but in six cases the interviews took place at a work location, but I tried to ensure that these felt informal. Therefore I had taken practical precautions, to ensure that the participant was encouraged to be 'open and honest', and beyond that I took the interview conversations on 'face value'.

3.4.2 Ethical Considerations

Monitoring and managing any potential ethical impact of this research was a critical part of the research process. I was asking people to remember their life history and sport experiences reminiscence for some might be a disagreeable experience. Prior to embarking on the data collection phase of the study, the project was approved by my supervisors. Before deciding to take part in the research the participants were informed about the nature of the research (by my initial contact letter and several phone calls). Participants were informed of the nature of the research through explaining the aims of the study, the use of any data collected for a PhD study and my role as a part-time student and full time member of staff at the University. They were informed that I would like to tape record the interview with their permission, that all data collected would be presented anonymously in the study and that they could withdraw from the study at any time they wished. When I went to interview those who had agreed to participate I again told the participants about my role and the purpose of the research and interview and I asked if they were happy to continue and for the interview to be recorded.

During the interview I was concerned that I might be asking participants to bring into the 'spotlight', sport experiences from childhood that they might feel emotional with regard to. This was certainly the case in some instances, as a number of subjects had negative experiences and, or looked back on their experiences with regret. There were some who had extremely negative experiences of physical education who spoke of 'bullying' and 'ridicule'. In all cases I watched carefully for any signs of distress, but these did not arise. Where respondents did hesitate, which was rare, I made sure to allow them to pause and did not rush them. I avoided any potential problems by reminding participants, in their initial contact letter, telephone call and at the interview; that they could finish the interview at any time they wanted and I stated that they did not have to answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable with. Indeed all those who did have negative experiences spoke at length about these and appeared to feel they could speak openly.

In the presentation of this study, both written and oral, I have changed the name of the participants, their family members, all other individuals named by them and

locations referred to. I have used their data and I am indebted to the participants for this insight into their lives. Bearing this in mind I have, attempted to give a picture of their experiences, feelings, meanings and interpretations, and re-read sections of my writing thinking from their perspective. However, it is important to note that my own life history as a sport participant and as an academic in the field of sport studies will have impacted on my interpretation of the data (see my earlier discussion). It was important that I engaged in self-reflexivity to avoid imposing my pre-existing beliefs and own experiences on the data collection. None the less, decisions had to be made about how to handle, analyse and then draw out the findings of the data and how to present and illustrate these themes with selected quotations. Unfortunately in a thesis of this length the responses of participants can not be given in full, instead I had to choose quotes or stories to illustrate themes within my theorising of the data, this tells some of each individual's story but not all. These have been chosen to best illustrate points and at the same time I have looked to ensure some balance across the thesis. However, I acknowledge that each individual has many voices and I am giving precedent to any related to sport participation and further, the illustration of this voice is fragmented by what I choose to include in the thesis (see Malson (2000), Ronai (1992) and Tsang (2000) for comments on fragmentation of 'voices' and 'identities'). The way in which this voice is illustrated is influenced by my position as interpreter. Ideally I would have taken my interpretations back to the participants to see if it resonated with their experiences, but time did not allow this and I acknowledge that this would be a useful process to ensure that the use of data is true to the participants' views. It is critical that I acknowledge that the final presentation of findings from this study, in the next three chapters is a:

... balancing act between three different and sometimes conflicting standpoints: (i) the multiple and varying voices and stories of each of the individuals we interview; (ii) the voice(s) of the researcher(s); (iii) the voices and perspectives represented within existing theories or frameworks in our research areas and which researchers bring to their studies.

(Doucet & Mauthner. 1998; p.12)

3.4.3 Research strength

Verification of knowledge is critical, but as I am dealing with a different way of knowing, debate on the suitability of evaluations of generalisability, reliability and

validity for qualitative research is very pertinent (see Kvale, 1996; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Validity appears to be the ‘wrong’ goal, grounded as it is within a view of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ science (look at Mellor, 2001 for a very interesting debate on this). Other researchers have considered alternatives; the quest for ‘purpose and utility for someone’ (House, 1980, p.90), ‘goodness’ (Peshkin, 1993, p.23) and ‘strength’ (Mellor, 2001, p.465). With this study I aimed for ‘strength’ as indicative of research success in several areas. In order to look at areas of research ‘strength’ a framework is required for evaluating research and qualitative researchers have proposed several (see for example, Kvale, 1996; Mellor, 2001; Peshkin, 1993). I drew my evaluation parameters from several of these.

Rather validity in new paradigm research lies in the skills and sensitivities of the researcher, in how he or she uses herself as knower, and as inquirer. Validity is more personal and interpersonal rather than methodological.

(Reason and Rowan, 1985, p.244)

I was concerned that my study should be ‘accurate’ and ‘trustworthy’. This was not a search for factual accuracy of event recall as experienced by the participants, and I have already discussed how this may be impossible and undesirable, when ‘meaning’ is more relevant. Instead I was concerned to ensure the reliability of my research approach, and my method design was the key to ensuring that people would give their honest views. Through data analysis, interpretation and final presentation of the thesis I needed to consider whether my interpretation would ‘ring true’ for the participants. Although I did not take an action research approach, I did try to honour all the participants ‘voices’. Linked to this it was critical that I should give a ‘full and honest’ account of the research process and my role in this and I have aimed to do this within this chapter. I also feel that writing in an accessible way and considering the value of the outcome to others is important. I presented my work at several conferences during the research period and also spoke about findings when teaching and at sport development practitioner forums; however a full consideration of policy and provision implications are beyond the scope of this thesis and will be explored through other avenues. Lastly as a key measure of strength, research must lead to new understandings and this written thesis is the test of this. ‘Strength’ is demonstrated by research that is conducted responsibly, intelligently and self-critically and which results in good, rich data. It is from this last point that I move onto discuss the findings from the data.

CHAPTER 4

A CONVENTIONAL VIEW OF SPORT?

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this and the following chapters I will explore the key themes emerging from the study. In this chapter I focus on the meaning of sport and physical activity, and in chapter 5 I explore self-definition in relation to sport and physical activity participation and changes across the life course. In chapter 6 I consider specifically the impact of the transition to mid-life and increasing roles and responsibilities, on participation in sport and physical activity.

The overall theme discussed in this chapter provides an insight into the way the mid-life adults perceived sport and physical activity. I discussed in Chapter 2 how the meaning of sport may influence people's decisions about participation. This chapter focuses on describing understandings and definitions of sport and considers sport's importance to the participants. The chapter acts predominantly as a foundation which sets up the particular meanings the interviewees afford to sport and associated activity, and explores tensions and contradictions within these, whereas Chapter 5 shows how this is at the core of participation decision making. The two Chapters (4 and 5) examine how the meanings associated with sport have a profound effect on attitudes towards sport and physical activity, participation in and the significance of this activity to personal identities.

Initially in the chapter I explore dominant and shared ideas about sport and I then move on to explore individual difference. Whilst others such as Seippel (2006) have taken 'meaning of sport' to be the 'reasons people give for being active' (p.52/53) and 'intentions in action' (p.53), this rather excludes the non- or less active-participant. I wished to look at how people experienced sport in their own way, which might include experience of the activity itself or not as the case may be. From a structuration perspective I explore how meaning is constructed, and I explore discourses of sport and physical activity which influence the relationship between the interviewees and the activity. Then using a social constructionist perspective I

consider the social and historical perspectives that participants may draw on to understand sport. I note how they draw on particular experiences and discourses, from experiences, others, media and institutional policy. I explore how meaning and value change over the life course, focusing particularly on youth, early and middle adulthood.

4.2 DEFINITIONS AND LABELLING OF SPORT

All of the individuals described their understanding of sport and physical activity. Indeed there were varied meanings attached to sport, and different types of activities. Interviewees often started by defining sport activity, but the meaning was not simplistic. In fact participants continually illustrated the meaning of sport to themselves during the interview and as a result demonstrated multiple layers of elements and characteristics. There was no single unified meaning identified by all, however there were clearly common elements that shone through. They all suggested that the meaning of sport had changed slightly over time. When this was explored, it became clear that while there were tensions around the conceptualisation of sport, the understandings remained rooted in early established views.

The themes that the individuals most often drew on to clarify their interpretation of sport were:

4.2.1 Definition or classification based:

- 4.2.1.1 Sport, is played in an organised and competitive context, involves hard physical activity, exertion and requires good levels of fitness.

- 4.2.1.2 Sport is epitomised by the type of activities completed at school.

- 4.2.1.3 Sport is about achievement not personal development

- 4.2.1.4 Sport is liked or disliked

- 4.2.1.5 Sport is non-leisure

4.2.2 Value based:

- 4.2.2.1 Sport has a greater purpose in childhood

- 4.2.2.2 Sport has a different purpose to other types of physical activity.

- 4.2.2.3 Sport is linked to physical and mental fitness

4.2.1 Definition or classification based meanings

Overall, the dominant ideas from my study participants included narrow definitions of sport and a tendency towards conventional representations of sport, fitting models of ‘achievement’ and ‘western’ sport (Eichberg, 2002ab, p.122 & 101). Sport was defined by activity played in an organised and competitive context, commonly a team game, involving hard physical activity and exertion, and requiring good levels of fitness. This they often commented was epitomised by the type of activities completed at school. The participants’ first response when asked about the meaning of sport was to talk about the characteristics and nature of sport, although a few spoke of their feelings towards the activity first. Several contrasted sport to other types of activities. The activities shared characteristics so in order to denote sport the nature of the activity was explained. They commented on the features of the activity, frequently using words such as ‘physical’, ‘competitive’ ‘activities’, ‘organised’, ‘team’ and ‘ball games’ and ‘school and Physical Education’. All commented on the physical exertion of sport, the level of physical activity, the competitive level played at, and the fact that fitness was required.

4.2.1.1 Sport, is played in an organised and competitive context, involves hard physical activity, exertion and requires good levels of fitness.

This sentiment is epitomised by Peter:

If you say sport I immediately think of football [*he laughs*] and any kind of team game like that. I would never associate running with being a sport. I know the Great North Run’s possibly brought that into the popular area more...hill walking I would never consider that to be a sport, although mountaineering is classed as a sport... It seems to be more like a leisure activity. Although sport is done for leisure...to me sport is something you do competitively; if there’s not a competitive edge it’s possibly not a sport...I always think of team games, strips, doing it in uniforms etc...Even offshore sailing, y’know it’s very competitive.... It’s not the first thing that springs to mind when you say sport. I just get a picture of a team game.

(Peter)

Peter’s understanding of sport illustrates the view that sport is competitive and that mainstream sports involves team play. To Peter sport is commonly a team game and even when other individual activities enter his thinking, he rejects the possibility that

these could be sport activities. Peter's view was a common theme within the participants' understanding of sport, which was often drawn upon. Similarly Emma shows the underlying role of school sport in informing the immediate association of team games and competition with sport, in her comments:

It was the team sports that was the norm, hockey, netball, rounders that sort of thing rather than very... we did do athletics and thing like that....but it was more school sports day type thing rather than competitions...

(Emma)

In the same way Keith explained that sport involved competition but also noted the physical skill and levels of fitness required for participation:

...for me it means something like organised competitive physical activity that involves physical skills and techniques so yes I think that's probably it, how I would define it, that it's a sense of it's organised, there's a sense of competition in whatever level and that it requires physical skill and fitness.

(Keith)

Several of the participants placed particular emphasis on the aspect of fitness and discipline noting that this was both a pre-requisite and could be an outcome of participation. For instance Craig, explains:

I suppose that's just what I've said to you by way of definition. Something where you're pushing your body kind of physical exercise, plus...I know it knocks out an awful lot of sports but usually something where there is an element of teamwork involved.

(Craig)

This illustrated an understanding of sport activities as challenging, complex, rule bound and requiring fitness for participation (like Coakley, 2003; Horne et al, 2001; Roberts, 2003). At the same time, activities had to be competitive, organised, regimented and disciplined to be deemed to be a sport and this theme is also apparent in Keith's view above and Peter's comments on uniforms and strips, suggesting a degree of organisation to the activity. This restricted definition of sport meant that if participation was more important than competition in a particular activity it was not deemed to be sport. Among my interviewees there was less acceptance of the idea of casual activity within sport. They noted that some activities were exercise, physical activity or recreation but not sport.

4.2.1.1 (A) Team or individual activity

As the interviewees above suggest 'team games' most frequently came to mind in the participants understanding of sport. As several describe:

...if somebody had said name a sport. I would have said football, cricket... team games again...thinking back I don't think I would have said like sort of gymnastics. Possibly even running and athletics they wouldn't have sprung to mind immediately. My idea of sport has always been a team game.

(Peter)

Well I guess they'd be sports that you participate in yourself...¹I always think that athletics isn't sport. I don't know why but when I think of sport I think of like football, rugby, like that.

(Rob)

Something two teams, win or lose kind of activity, rather than an individual activity like golf or sailing.

(Kate)

Craig in the comment presented earlier also suggested a struggle to reconcile individual activity with sport. These participants' assertions that team games are core to the activity definition is not uncommon, as they exemplify the '...traditional, rule-bound, competitive and masculinised dominant sport culture...' (Tomlinson et al, 2005; p.4).

The findings above highlight the emphasis on competition and physicality, and the overt association of team games with sport for the middle aged interviewees. These findings are consistent with previous studies which found that sport necessarily involves 'musculinity' (Hargraves, 1994), intense, fitness focused physical activity (Scott-Porter, 2002), prowess (skill and ability), competitiveness, organisation or structure, and frequently team games (Coakley & White, 1992; Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Hargreaves, 1986; Scott-Porter, 2002; Sleaf, 1998), regiment and discipline (Deem & Gilroy, 1998). Among the interviewees who had less involvement with sport, there was much talk about the rules, complexity and structure of sport. Previously Lenskyj suggested that sport was '...rigidly circumscribed by the clock, the rulebook...' (1988, p.239). Linked to this, nearly all

¹ ... indicates a short pause in the participant's speech or text removed which was less relevant or would possibly lead to the participant's identification.

the participants drew a distinction between sport and play, where play was simple, involving little or no rules and often endless hours of activity. In contrast sport was viewed as ‘organised’ by those with positive experiences of the activity and ‘regimented’ by those with negative experiences. These views illustrate a sense of sport as facilitating and inclusive on one hand, and exclusive on the other, with this latter feeling linked to a requirement to be the same as others, not to deviate in performance and the way activity is played or conducted.

The participants talked about ‘hard work’ and ‘physical effort’, and this was more evident among those who had been committed participants or who had continually tried to participate but felt feelings of incompetence. Although they added to this a distinction between exercise and sport, denoting that exercise could be for training in support of sport, or health and fitness, but was not a sport in itself. To comment on this I introduce Rachel and Keith, married participants. Keith had been an active lifelong sports participant, in contrast to his wife who participated a little but disliked sport. They comment:

I think I would tend to think of going to the gym and keeping fit as a bit separate from sport. I think is a more physical involvement and there’s a particular end to it...

(Rachel)

[*Commenting about exercising in a leisure club*] “...in some ways I don’t see it as sport I see it as exercise and training but something that I’ve really enjoyed and valued...

(Keith)

The comments on fitness required for activity also showed that the sport might be classified according to a spectrum of physical activity intensity (Scott-Porter, 2002, p.36-37), with sport and fitness activities at the high intensity end and recreational, family, home based physical activity at the other end. This reflects other authors arguments that a scientific and/or medical definition of sport (Fullagar, 2003), based on movement and energy expenditure has dominated.

The previous studies largely focused on young people, women or men only, so the findings of this study on organised, competitive and team activity as sport, show that these common characteristics of sport may be applicable to the middle-aged across

both genders. Furthermore this finding is consistent with discussions about the 'constitutive essence of sport' (Sippel, 2006).

4.2.1.1 (B) Hierarchy of activities

The findings suggested a form of activity hierarchy and this was not only understood by way of physical intensity (Fullagar, 2003; Scott-Porter, 2002), but also in terms of the competitive and performance orientation of activity. This was apparent in how the participants spoke about the definition of activity as 'real sport', by way of reference to a narrow range of characteristics, that were explicitly recognised as epitomising the nature of 'true sport'. There was evidence of labelling some activities as clearly sport, these tended to be team ball games, whilst other more diverse activities fell into a 'grey area', including individual activities, and other physical activities such as keep fit, dance, hill walking, cycling and sailing which were labelled as either recreation, or just as activity. This left some activities on the fringes of 'sport' and as Fullagar (2003) suggested the participants sensed that these activities were undervalued by society, for example Kate says about activity '...it was always the rugby ones that were really important'. There was also a sense that whilst an activity might be in sport, participation would only be defined as sport if it fulfilled physical, competitive and organised characteristics. Whilst previous studies have suggested that more passive activities fall outside the definition of sport (Fullagar, 2003), the participants in my study even positioned individual but competitive and physically hard activities as some way down the spectrum from 'sport'. Sport was always seen as 'organised and vigorous' (Lake, 2001, p.86). This often meant that there was debate in the minds of some participants as to whether the activity they participated in was a sport.

4.2.1.1 (C) Narrow and persistent definitions

Definitions of sport were generally narrowly defined, keeping close to the types of activities experienced at school, particularly team games. As Phil said:

...I think I would have probably said that sport would have embraced any emm competitive element, football, rugby, emm athletics, tennis any of those sort of games as it were.... I would have viewed that more as sport really...

(Phil)

The continued definition of sport in these terms in middle-age suggests a continuity of meaning throughout life, as previous research among younger groups has produced similar findings (Coakley & White, 1992; Lake, 2001). This finding is also supported by the assertion that the understanding of sport was established early and remains persistent. Many of the participants accepted the idea that there could be other activities beyond team games which are sport, but their clearest understanding of sport is the 'team game' and they had difficulties in accepting the idea that individual activities could be sport.

The narrow and restricted manner in which sport was viewed was clearly tied to memories of PE and youth sport and was established early on. There was a high level of continuity in the participants' meanings of sport which appeared remarkably resistant to change. The definition of sport remained the same regardless of change in personal experience and wider change in cultural understanding of sport (Rowe et al, 2004b). However, whilst 'top of the mind' associations of sport were narrowly defined, considered definitions of what constitutes sport were wider and Scott-Porter's study (2002) found the same with their participants.

Some of the respondents did wonder whether sport might encompass a wider and more inclusive range of activities. They suggested that they had started to change their sense of 'what sport is' during adult life. However, they tended to distance themselves from the wider and looser definition of sport after some discussion and tended to fall back on the narrow definition of activity as being the definition of 'real sport'. They were now aware of a wider range of possible sport activities either through media and popular coverage, or in many cases because of their participation as adults or the participation of their children. For many their understanding of sport was now more sophisticated, with participants noting that sport through media and entertainment gave them the idea that there '...was oceans more going on out there' (Keith). Whilst they discussed the notion of this wide range of activities, they did not tend to think of them within their concept of sport. Interestingly Rob (quoted on

p.107 in this chapter) cited team games before considering any of the several activities he participates in himself. Some participants found that their own experiences of a wider range of activities challenged the notion of what sport could be, others were aware of competitive versions of some sports e.g. mountaineering, but they still came back to the sense of 'real sport' being described as a narrow range of activities. Jane, Clare, Kate and Heather's comments illustrate this point:

Probably dance, I didn't really consider it ever a sport, I suppose it's a bit movement isn't it.

(Jane)

I don't know I mean I used to do keep fit. I used to go to like a step class and things, but I sort of stopped that after sort of two years erm but that's all I mean I never sort of saw it as sport in general I just saw it as keep fit.

(Clare)

You see your definition of sport I think most people's definition of sport would be mine, do you not think because I think most people would not classify yoga or the things that I do as sport. The average person wouldn't agree or your average man, I think your average person would not recognise Jazz dance or body expression or yoga as sport.

(Kate)

Keep fit. [*Laughs.*] The first thing I would think about if you say sport I would think of things on the television like football and golf and the main things like that. But that isn't exactly sport for me because I would never do anything in a team sport, so that's the first thing I would think. But for me it is just going to the gym and keeping fit.

(Heather)

In the latter comment Heather contrasts her top of the mind association of sport, which is culturally derived, with her personal understanding of sport, but it is clear that her overt view of sport is based upon the traditional definitions dominating television coverage. Meanwhile Kate's comment is interesting, suggesting she had an awareness that her definition of sport should match others views. There is also a sign of a gendered perspective that traditional definitions of sport are masculine. In a similar fashion, Peter made it clear that although some of the activities he regularly participated in were very competitive (such as regional and international off-shore sailing), he did not view them as sport because the competition was not his participation motive. Sport to Peter was still defined as organised competition and he did not accept a wider range of activities than his experience of school activities, despite his serious involvement in competitive off-shore sailing, and running.

Some participants had different experiences of sport in adult life, compared to the conventional sense of the activity. The activities they participated in as adults were centred on pleasure and participation, with personal growth benefits in a supportive atmosphere. They spoke about the possibility of seeing sport in a different way, but still came to the same conclusions about 'real sport'. Therefore as the participants narrowly defined sport many of the activities that they were involved in did not fall into this category. Kate provides an example of this, as a particularly active woman, who participates in fitness, dance classes and outdoor activities, but holds a very narrow definition of sport. Effectively she defines sport as all the activities that she is not interested in, perhaps this is based on her feeling excluded from sport during her youth, suggesting that she cannot imagine that any activities she is successful in would be part of sport.

When questioning the narrow definition of sport, a number of the participants did present a broader understanding of sport; however only Jackie, Ben and Penny provided a definite view that sport encompassed a wide range of activities. For example Jackie's understanding of sport was clearly linked to her experiences, as her top-of-mind association of sport was "...keep fit and that types of things... going to the gym". Or consider the range of activities cited by Penny: "It varies running, swimming, orienteering, climbing, football, hockey, kind of ball games...things like that...err tennis, hockey, squash, swimming that sort of thing, gym erm the whole range". However, it is Ben who gives the widest description of what he would class to be sport as he emphasises:

Well everything, I suppose you could say everything just about probably, darts things like that scrapes in. So all the things like running a marathon and all these very long events where they run for days on end and whatever. Anything which involves activities, physical activity...and maybe chess, it could be a mental thing as well.

(Ben)

He also included 'sporty thing's such as 'wide games' played at cubs and scouts as a boy. Several other participants spent some time wondering whether other activities were sport in the interview, but it was clear that their sense, that sport was a narrow range of activities, held fast. There was a common sense of considering other activities in talk about sport but returning to a conventional definition of the activity.

Emma classed sport as:

Team games at school yeah, that sort of thing, swimming...all...sorts of things really I'd class as...football...all of those really... I think aerobics and things like that is classed as a sport although it's not a competitive sport its still to me its a way of exercising as well so I see sport as an exercise and an enjoyment thing as well as a competitive thing.

At others times she stressed that sport was a competitive activity, rather than fully embracing the looser view of sport that she presents here. Likewise Keith was able to articulate a full view of the Council of Europe (1993) view of sport, but was unable to accept this wide sense. He discusses his struggle to accept his knowledge derived from a career in sport provision, that the view of sport was now much wider, as he goes on to say:

It's probably easier to talk about ones I wouldn't classify. I think I would struggle with something like snooker or darts, in that well it seems to me that partly because they don't require physical fitness or I'm sure people would tell me otherwise but they seem not to require high levels of physical fitness to play at a top level. I mean obviously there are other sports you can do and play without very much physical fitness at a lower level, but to play at a top level that's not the case so those would be examples. I'm trying to think what else. What else would I struggle to include in sport, I'm not quite sure what the best category is to put things into but things like hill-walking and so on just seems to be more about leisure and recreation than about sport, they're about physical activity and/or exercise and sport seems to me to require a narrower definition of that. I think I would struggle with either with the sports council definition that's too inclusive or the Olympic movement being too inclusive because it just seems to sort of somehow lose its distinctiveness, of what sport is about.

(Keith)

Keith seems to find it easier to identify what is not a sport, suggesting there are clearly boundaries which exclude some activity. His struggle to position recreational activity, such as hill walking, in relation to sport highlights the blurring of boundaries between sport and other forms of physical activity. Critically, those who had been very active in traditional sports, such as Emma, Jane, Keith, Phil, Craig and Andy had very narrow and tight views of sport, excluding many activities. Some of these participants participated at a lower level of commitment or performance in adult life and whilst still in the same sport, felt that their participation was not truly sport. Sport involved participation in a physically hard and competitive context and for some this notion was rigid and fixed.

The emphasis on a narrow range of activities is not surprising, given that it is this form of sport which is given greatest emphasis in the public domain. European sport policy directives suggest that sport provision and development should be based on a wide definition of sport (Council of Europe, 1993), which “extends far beyond traditional team games to incorporate individual sports and fitness related activities such as aerobics and certain dance activities, as well as recreational activities such as long walks and cycling” (Rowe et al, 2004b; p.6). Likewise, Sport England (2005b) state they are concerned about increasing participation in sport and *active recreation*². However the reality of how sport was perceived by my participants was different and this interpretation is supported by Hunt et al (2001) and Lake (2001) who argue that the continued emphasis of education provision on developing excellence and the focus of media coverage on team sports play important roles in developing the public perception of sport. They suggest that this further highlights the differences between ‘the average person on the street and the athlete’ (Hunt et al, 2001; p.152). I would assert that my participants associate sport with ‘the athlete’. Likewise Seippel (2006) notes that the communication surrounding modern sport continues to centre on achievements. The focus on achievement and a narrow range of activities was also more explicit when the middle-aged interviewees were young.

The understanding of the breadth of sport is not so simple. Certainly among several of my participants, there was an evident tension between a notion of sport based on wider awareness of sports and a sense that others would see ‘real sport’ as what was offered at school and dominates the media. However, for others there was a tension between an awareness that the definition of sport might encompass a wider range of activities, in contrast to an experience and usually positive, in a narrow and traditional range of activities. This suggests that these latter interviewees were challenged by wider, liberal views of sport but resisted these.

Overall whilst the same activity might have various meanings to different people (Lewis & Ridge, 2005; Seippel, 2006), my participants have tended to emphasise what constitutes sport, as ‘legitimised association’ (Scott-Porter, 2002) over their own ideas of sport’s meaning to them. There was a clear attempt to characterise what

² This is my emphasis.

sport is not and this perhaps reflects the similarity of sport, to other types of physical activity. This was certainly apparent in the way in which their voices came to the fore or faded in comparison to their view of social expectations (Gilligan, 1993). The consideration of other activities under the term 'sport' does suggest that they were attempting new ways of looking at meaning. It was clear that the participants were active in a number of 'new and growth sports' (Coalter, 2004; p.79), such as swimming, keep fit, cycling and weights, but they tended to label these activities as outside of sport. Yet, these are the types of activities that Coalter (1999, 2004) and Rowe et al. (2004b) see greatest participation increases in, among the adult population.

4.2.1.1 (D) Silencing their own experiences

The participants who considered wider definitions of sport were considering their personal experience of other activities and the growing movement towards a looser definition of sport activity (Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Hunt et al, 2001; Rowe et al, 2004b; Wright et al, 2002). Their attempt to give voice to their other experiences illustrates the tensions between social and personal constructions of sport. A number seemed to feel apprehensive about the validity of their definition of sport and asked for confirmation of its correctness. For example both Heather and Peter were unsure whether activities that they participate in can really be classed as sport:

I go to the gym now, I go out on bike rides and walking. We do quite a lot of walking. Would that be classed as sport? Hill walking?
(Heather)

I don't know if this is a sport...I used to do quite a bit of off shore sailing. Which is again a lot more physical than I first thought ...again whether it's a sport, I not sure if it's sport or not. I used to do a lot of hill walking...
(Peter)

Even though the activities they participate in meet most of the sport criteria, because they are not all competitive (except Peter's sailing), they are unsure whether they are sport or exercise.

Overall, all of the participants were readily able to give a definition of sport and they seemed to have clear ideas of basic characteristics. However, some did question the

suitability of their definition and, or question their interpretation of cultural constructions of sport. For some expressing more detailed and personal meanings was more difficult. The participants readily gave definitions of characteristics of sport, even when asked 'what sport means to you'. Many of the participants appeared to be less comfortable with relating their personal views on what sport meant to them. Typically they seemed to be giving an interpretation of what they thought sport should be. There were only two individuals, John and Craig who commented solely on the meaning of sport to them, based on their own personal experiences. John gave meanings of sport, which were clearly his feelings towards sport, rather than definitions of categorisations of activities. Sport to him meant 'pain and suffering, competition and that's about it'. The meaning of activity to him was related to his childhood experiences, which he vividly recounted in the interview. In some other cases they would define sport, explain fleetingly what it meant to them and then keep returning to what it meant to other people.

Many of the other participants drew clear distinctions between 'what sport means to me', in contrast to 'what sport is'. This was frequently the case where they had negative views of sport or wondered whether sport would encompass a wider range of activities. The images that people described of 'real sport' made reference to a narrow range of characteristics that were explicitly recognised as epitomising the nature of 'true sport'. However, there was a sense that the real understanding of sport was about personal meaning, even if down valued by some. For some there were contradictions between their explicit definition of sport and then their later comments on the meaning of sport or their description of sport as having a different meaning to them which was implicit elsewhere in the interview. By relegating their own views they were subscribing to culturally legitimated views of sport. In this way they accepted a mainstream view of sport, by explaining their understanding of the social view of sport.

Previous research has also found that many of the physical activities participated in by women fall outside of a 'tight' definition of sport. Deem and Gilroy argued that:

...by redefining sport to include it as part of the concept of physical activity, it is possible to include a wider category of activities than those more commonly regarded as sport (for example, dancing and walking).

Deem and Gilroy's recommendation (1998) and likewise the call of others such as Wright et al (2002) does suggest a widening of the consideration of sport, but does not suggest a conceptual change in the understanding of sport. Likewise, although health promotion directed at adults in more recent years has moved away from a focus on sport performance and team sports, to integration of more physical activity in daily life (Hunt et al, 2001), this does not suggest a changing view of sport in itself. Whilst, these discourses are pushing the boundaries of definitions, sport still has greater public profile than physical activity. My assertion is that my interviewees had absorbed and therefore reflected these tensions. I would assert that some of my participants were questioning the discourses that suggested sport had to be 'competitive' and very 'physical', but that many had embraced a traditional and particularly narrow view of sport, which might exclude the type of activity they participated in (Kirk, 2006).

4.2.1.2 Sport is epitomised by the type of activities completed at school

When describing sport, the participants frequently referred to school sports. The view of Kate, expresses how the range of activities considered to be sport by many participants was derived from the activities experienced at school: 'I would define sport as what you do at school...Football, netball, hockey, emm that kind of thing...Ball games, team games'. For most the immediate sense of sport was still intrinsically linked to school and childhood, participation experiences. It is not surprising that there are common elements in their understanding of the nature of sport, as childhood was a time when they were forced to have some awareness of sport because of compulsory physical education at school.

There was also an apparent link between the participants listing of sport characteristics and the characteristics of childhood sport. This finding appeared to echo the 'generalisations on past experiences' and the tie 'to memories of PE and school sports' illustrated in previous research (Coakley and White, 1992), where PE was 'largely synonymous with games and sport' (Jones & Cheetham, 2001; p.90). These links may be inherent in conventional constructions of sport participation.

There was a sense among the participants that their childhood awareness of sport activities was of a limited range of traditional sport activities. Some described how they developed awareness of other activities, particularly individual sports later, but the sports which were often little played in adult life (Coalter, 1999, 2004; Hunt et al, 2006) remained central to their concept of sport. Building on the sense that participants viewed sport as hierarchical, the participants referred to team activity and sport in reference to PE, almost exclusively (like Lake, 2001). There was little reference to other participation modes in PE; except for some talk of physical training and comment on different modes they would have liked more of in PE, such as dance. Specific team sports and competitive activity that had been pushed by their school were of greatest value. Kate remembers clearly how rugby was the most important activity at school as she comments:

Because every Monday morning the Head read out the results of the rugby ...it was always the rugby ones that were really important, so he always read the results...I think it provided it [*team sports*]...to make a mark because it was a grammar school, ...one of the ways was through sport...

(Kate)

Similarly most of the participants suggested that the activities that teachers took 'seriously' were real sport. Sometimes this was to the neglect of other activities, as several of the female participants recalled that dance and gymnastics had to be self-organised because the teachers concentrated on running competitive games for other pupils at the same time. Peter expanded on this when he suggested that classes for the average or less abled pupil were neglected as teachers focused on developing their competitive teams. As he says:

Because if you go towards games I would say I thought then and I still think now that some of the games master's erm took it a bit too serious. Took the competitive side a bit too serious and the general classes, the subject classes, were slightly neglected to allow them to develop the cricket team or the rugby team erm and I know the teachers gave their time out of school for nothing, but it gave them and the school prestige for Rugby. In particular they always wanted the school Rugby to do well and maybes we suffered, the normal people suffered a little bit and that was the fault of the teachers. I thought of that then. I mean I still feel that in them days, I don't know whether teachers are more enlightened now and try to spread it about a bit more. But certainly then, it was elitist, if that's the right word, to use. Then and looking back now, that feeling hasn't changed.

(Peter)

4.2.1.3 Sport is about achievement not personal development

Generally the participants perceived that sport is about performance and achievement, more so than personal development. At youth level many participants remember picking up the idea that sport was about participating for ‘the school’ and the stress on achievement overshadowed any focus on personal development. Comparison of times or records of performance to others, showed the social significance of comparative performance which was seen as an essential element of sport and a continued meaning beyond school (Guttman, 1978). For example “my times used to be pretty good” (Rob), ‘I managed to get the 5 star award’ (Ben), ‘I did get the sports award’ (Emma) ‘I started to improve very quickly and get some good times’ (Phil), ‘the standard wasn’t particularly good, which made me look like a big star to be honest’ (Craig) were typical comments showing comparison to others or measures of achievement. In contrast Peter explained his comparison as personal progression, as he said ‘I’ve got every run I’ve ever done written down with the times, just to see the performance’ (Peter). However, the comparison to external reference points was more evident.

Many of the participants achieved in school sport and recalled the enjoyment of recognition, with comments such as ‘I felt really pleased’, ‘I was proud to collect the award’, ‘it made me feel good’ and ‘I think it did give me some self-esteem and self confidence’. Others did not feel positive about the association of sport with performance. For Penny the association of sport with achievement, rather than participation, led to a lack of enjoyment. She suggests that alternative notions of achievement might have been more meaningful, as she comments:

I don’t think I remember much about the good times really at school...because although I liked the athletics and I enjoyed the discus, running and things like that I don’t think I was particularly good at it. I mean I would have been coming last in running races and things like that, so I wasn’t particularly good at it. So that’s probably the difference. Whereas you know, I achieved at walking. It’d have been quite nice if they’d have had the D of E [*Duke of Edinburgh*]³ at our school so that

³ The Duke of Edinburgh award is a programme which aims ‘...to provide for young people an enjoyable, challenging and rewarding programme of personal development, which is of the highest quality and the widest reach’ (The Duke of Edinburgh Award, 2006). It was established in 1956 and still runs today. The programme includes physical recreation, a residential project, service, skills and

you could have joined in that and got some sort of achievement from it and then I might have enjoyed it but they didn't.

(Penny)

There were other participants, like Penny, who suggested that a focus on achievement debased their experiences of sport at school. Among those participants who felt this way, they responded in different ways. Rob, Ben and Penny were to some extent critical of the lack of opportunities but at the same time accepted the sense that this 'is what sport is like', whilst Kate, Peter and John were very critical and suggested that sport could have been facilitated in a different way. This is illustrated in Peter's comments below:

It's certainly looking back...you thought well these people, I can still see them now, they're teachers pets, they're good at sports, they're the snobs as w'used to call them and we weren't. We were glad to get out of it, glad of the lack of attention know what I mean, by that. The teacher never bothered with us and we never bothered. I remember years later I seen a programme on the television, I can't remember what it was and there was a sports teacher and it was a classic scenario that they had the very good people and the people who are pretty useless and the lads who were quite good said 'oh, why do we waste time with them' and the teacher said, and I always remember this, it's stuck in my mind, he say's 'oh it's my job to give everybody an opportunity, whether they're good or bad, not just concentrate on the good people.' Now if our teacher had of said that to us, our attitudes might have been different.

(Peter)

The basis of meaning of sport on school PE experiences continues to be reflected in other research. Lake (2001) found that all young people sampled (16-18 years of age) mentioned sport in relation to 'what is Physical Education', and PE was seen to have similar characteristics to sport. Likewise Coakley and White (1992) and Flintoff and Scraton (2001) report similarly narrow and restricted definitions of sport, in their research with young people. Real sport was 'what they had occasionally participated in when they were in school, but it was not what they did on their own for recreational purposes' (Coakley & White, 1992). Similarly Horne et al commented that with '...adult organised youth sport the aim tends to be performance-oriented, often involving notions such as dominance over opposing teams, and emphasising toughness and hard, disciplined work (learning skills and rules) over spontaneity, expression and creativity" (2001, p.149). This view was common among the

expeditions. For the physical recreation section, candidates are expected to demonstrate personal development in some form of enjoyable physical activity.

participants in Scott-Porter's (2002) study who commented on the 'task oriented' nature of the activities.

The young people interviewed in Flintoff & Scraton (2001) would no doubt have different experiences of sport during their lifetime than the middle-aged interviewees. However, Flintoff & Scraton's research showed a gap between the sport delivered via the national curriculum to young people and their participation in active leisure. This complements my findings on the focus of school activity on achievement in team sports, which appears to form a foundation to a lifelong view of sport. For those who continued to participate in traditional, competitive sport, the meaning clearly matches their experiences. This understanding of sport fails to take into account other forms of physical activity participated in by my interviewees.

4.2.1.4 Sport is liked or disliked

Whilst the way in which sport was defined was tied to school sport experiences, most of the interviewees also referred to their feeling towards sport when discussing meanings. It was clear that these feelings were often based on earlier experiences. At school, sport by way of PE was a compulsory activity. Some enjoyed sport, whilst some very deliberately avoided any school sport and PE wherever possible. Comments such as '...absolutely thoroughly enjoyed it', 'it was a social thing as well', 'doing something that we wanted to' illustrated this. A number did not enjoy school PE, suggesting that it was 'painful', 'humiliating', an 'ordeal', a 'nightmare', 'really annoying', and that they 'hated PE' and 'just didn't like it'. The emphasis on competitive activity within sport, led to enjoyable feelings related to the joy of play, winning and being part of a team for some, but on the other hand competitive sport meant feelings of exclusion for others; this suggests that the attraction of the activity was linked to the meaning of sport as competitive. It is important to note that for nearly all, activity away from school had greater appeal, and this reiterates previous findings (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Rich, 2004; Wright et al, 2003).

Despite the lack of enjoyment for some, they always participated because it was 'part of school' and something they 'had to do'. As Rob said 'you've got to do it, so you might as well just put up with it'. However, linked to the previous discussion about

the focus of achievement in sport, some felt in hindsight that they should have rebelled and should have questioned the lack of support. Expectations of what would happen in sport participation were, for many, based on early experiences and, for several, these were negative. For example, for some interviewees sport meant discomfort and likewise Lake also found that meaning was based on the '...assumption that exercise must be painful' (2001; p.86). However, for some their expectations of what would happen changed when they were encouraged to participate in late youth or adult life by supportive friends or colleagues. However, despite more positive experiences their attitude towards 'sport' in general remained clearly linked to earlier experiences.

The formation of this view is also observed in others studies where past participation colours the view of sport (Coakley & White, 1992; Deem & Gilroy, 1998). My participants express both positive and negative understandings of sport from early experiences. Similarly Lake (2001) showed a contrast between young people's experiences of sport as positive- challenge, winning, competition and personal development, and negative – incompetence and frustration. It appears that the choice of activities, the support offered by PE teachers and their attitudes will impact on the meaning of sport as one associated with success or failure for the particular individual. Frequently it is those with negative experiences of sport in early life that have a narrow and fixed view of what sport can be. This is supported by Leith and Shaw (1997), and Deem and Gilroy (1998) who discuss the role of school PE in teaching girls to frequently dislike sport. Likewise where sport had positive meaning, this was often based on enjoyment of sociable and interactive elements (Smith & Parr, 2007). At the same time some of my participants had neutral orientations towards school PE suggesting that it had offered a break from other academic subjects, had brought some enjoyment and achievement, and allowed them to show some competence (Lake, 2001).

In essence, for the participants, their childhood experiences were frequently drawn upon to illustrate their sense of what sport 'really is' and their feelings towards it. The feelings appeared to last into adult life. Several discussed their feelings towards sport now and across their lifetime when talking about the meaning of the activity.

I didn't enjoy the look of the social end of rugby at university and therefore didn't want to participate in it, and ended up playing for the football team.

(Craig)

[*About joining a swimming club*] "...that was alright, there were a few people I knew there and it wasn't so bad as long as I could do breaststroke and not the things I didn't like...

(Ben)

Where meaning was expressed in terms of feelings, several felt the need to clarify the context, sport and situation in which their feeling applies. Ben qualifies his enjoyment of swimming, suggesting that this only applies when he knows people there and he could swim a stroke he felt competent in. Craig contrasts sport contexts with different social values. This is similar to Lake's (2001, p.82) findings that many students expressed qualified attraction to sport. There were varying orientations to sport and for a number of pupils enjoyment would only apply in particular circumstances. This qualified orientation shows the importance of personal meaning. Others expressed feelings towards sport by expressing interest or lack of. Some were keen on the challenge, competition and winning. There was certainly a distinction between feelings towards competitive and team sport, and alternative modes of participation. Whilst there were mixed feelings surrounding competitive team sport, the feelings reported about alternative, informal activity were enjoyment such as: 'I think it's something where you can go somewhere different, see different places and just enjoy being out in the fresh air' (Penny). 'I always thought it was a social thing really. Nothing competitive at all' (Emma), 'I loved the whole thing of the run' (John) 'Just being out there with the peace and quiet' (Peter). Feelings towards sport were linked to the characteristics associated with sport, but also the purpose of the activity and the value of it and I consider this later in the chapter and in chapter 5. Meanwhile in the next section, the last on definition based meaning, I consider how the enjoyment or not, of sport determined whether sport was viewed as leisure.

4.2.1.5 Sport is non-leisure

Another sub-theme that emerged was that whilst sport was defined as an activity that should be a leisure experience, not all participants interpreted sport in this way.

Clare, Emma and Jane's comments show the leisure element of sport:

Sport to me is enjoyable exercise, enjoyable exercise...Sport in general is just enjoying exercise, it can be very competitive if you want it to be, if you're into sport in a big way, as a competitive sport but I never was, it was just enjoyment to me apart from team sport at school where you were out to win but erm that's what sport is to me.

(Emma)

...Something that you enjoy doing.

(Clare)

A means of exercise, which you can, should be enjoyable, in your leisure time, something that you enjoy, not something that you have to do because you feel as though you ought to do it. [*Laughs*] Should be something that you enjoy, something that's pleasurable.

(Jane)

Jane's comment shows her belief that activity is only sport if it is freely chosen and enjoyed, not participated in out of compulsion. This is in line with Seippel (2006) who found that the most widespread reasons for participation in sport were fun and enjoyment. However, whilst they suggested sport could be leisure, most of the female interviewees (and a few male) did not define sport and physical activity as leisure or enjoyable activity for themselves, instead defining it in some cases as 'hard work', 'difficult', 'pushing my body to very near its limits'.

Applying Mansvelt's (1997) metaphorical construction of 'real leisure' as non-work, illustrates the participants' views of the non-leisure nature of the activity. This finding is consistent with previous studies of women which found that many did not associate physical activity with leisure experience or enjoyment (Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Leith & Shaw, 1997; Thomsson, 1999). Several drew a contrast between leisure activities which were relaxing such as reading, cooking, and listening to music, as Rachel suggested "...and I thought I should get a hobby to help me relax so I got a jigsaw for Christmas'. This was in line with previous findings of Leith and Shaw who noted that "...relaxing activities were thought of as 'fun' and 'enjoyable' while physical activity was often more associated with 'work' or thought to be a 'chore' (1997, p.350). This overall theme was linked to whether sport was valued for the process of participation, '...physical activity for its own sake' (Deem & Gilroy, 1998; p.99) and centred on the notion of 'pleasure as central' (Fullagar, 2003; p.54) or for the outcome only, such as wellbeing and fitness. In fact Deem and Gilroy considered whether sport could be situated in women's leisure, and found that sport and physical activity could provide enjoyment and relaxation, but often did not due

to constraints, narrow views of sport and association with ‘...masculinities, compulsion and harsh disciplinary regimes’ (1998, p.102). There were several reasons why sport was considered to be non-leisure, the ‘hard work’ aspect, negative experiences where they had tried to participate socially and in some cases low physical skill levels or fitness which made participation ‘hard work’. Similarly Leith and Shaw (1997) found that perceiving sport and physical activity was ‘work’ or a ‘chore’, negative experiences and low skills levels explained why participants in their study did not define these activities as leisure.

In contrast, those who particularly valued sport indicated how they enjoyed the process of participation and chose to participate for this reason. This reflects senses of leisure, as leisure consciousness and engrossment (Sellar & Boshoff, 2006), demonstrating as Neulinger describes ‘self-motivated conduct that contains its own reward’ (Roberts, 1999, p.147). Phil’s comments on how sport released him from the stresses of daily life aptly reflect this.

I find that I can think a lot if I’m on my own, about problems and I found myself being able to almost solve problems, sometimes at work take a different slant, a different perspective on things. I really do enjoy it. There is nothing better than being out there and feeling the wind on your face and moving fluently and fluidly and springing along there, and really enjoying it you know.

(Phil)

However, it is interesting that Phil speaks of both the leisure experience through sport and the use of time to ‘think’ through work problems, therefore connecting sport to the work element of life. None the less, the majority commented on the destressing effects when they did participate in sport and physical activity, yet this was not viewed as leisure which suggests a more complex link to wellbeing enhancement. I look at this in more detail in Chapter 6.

The very active participants who enjoyed sport, suggested that sport was an activity they spend ‘leisure time’ on, but did not deem it to be leisure in itself. In fact several drew a distinction between sport and leisure, as Keith’s comments illustrated:

...hill-walking and so on just seems to be more about leisure and recreation than about sport, they’re about physical activity and/or exercise and sport seems to me to require a narrower definition of that.

(Keith)

This distinction is perhaps because leisure is associated with ‘exercise’ or ‘fun’ to them and sport to them has a serious intent, with training, commitment and regular play. This seems to link to a wider notion of sport as non-leisure. Overall, there was a sense that participation for feelings of enjoyment, rather than physical intensity was devalued by some participants. This is consistent with Kleiber’s (2000) discussion on the neglect of relaxation and ‘just being’ as leisure and Fullagar’s comments where discourses ‘...value productivity and demonstrable effort, which subordinates other ways of being that include relaxation, peacefulness, contemplation, ease of movement, and awareness of moment...” (2003, p.54). Several of my participants mentioned feelings of aesthetic pleasure, such as Kate’s feelings about all the activities she participates in:

Em they are all in beautiful countryside I suppose like cycling and kayaking. I wouldn’t do those in really horrible places. I like the aspect of being in beautiful countryside and jazz dance, I like because of the music...

(Kate)

However, when contrasted to their comments on sport, it was clear that physically intense movement was deemed to be more important and ‘worthwhile’, than the natural meaning of what was often less intense physical activity. However, these participants did define sport as leisure for others.

Linked to this, other participants had been involved in constructive leisure, which involved physical activity. Jane, Peter, Keith, Ben and Penny talked at length of involvement in, what was often intense and skilled physical activity, within this context. For example, Peter described his adult experiences volunteering as a military reservist which involved outdoor activities, sport and physical training, whilst Jane talked of dance training, shows, and outdoor activities with a uniformed youth organisation in her late teenage and young adult years. Both spoke of the meaning of the activity, where they participated in what they declared were supportive contexts which they contrasted to less positive experiences of sport elsewhere. Others have noted the different model offered by constructive leisure, as McCormack explains ‘unlike sport and physical recreation, constructive leisure need not test physical ability nor offer an enforced sense of competition” (2005; p.67).

At the same time that some did not see the activity as leisure for themselves, they felt it should be leisure for others. This was apparent in concerns about serious participation. This was different to leisure as 'freely chosen' and instead centred on the importance of fun and enjoyment. Among many there was a sense that sport could be leisure for those who enjoy it, but that it should be participated in for enjoyment and not seriously instigated. However, for those who were active and committed competitive participants, sport was distinct from leisure sport. Overall, there were complex and contradictory meanings surrounding the link between leisure and sport. There were senses of sport as non-leisure, constructive leisure and tensions between sport as 'leisure' and 'serious' activity.

4.2.2 Value based meanings

After defining characteristics of the activity the most common explanation of sports related to values and benefits. Correspondingly MacDonald and Tinning (1995) note that sport is normally regarded as unconditionally positive. Whilst some really valued the activity, all the participants defined sport participation as a worthwhile activity, saying that it was 'important', 'a good thing' 'valuable', or 'something people should be doing'. The purpose of activity, relevance and importance to them and others, were frequently explained as part of their understanding of sport. Some wholeheartedly valued sport whilst others had difficulties understanding the eminence of sport and did question the mainstream discourses regarding the benefits of sport. This centred on looking at the process and outcomes. As Slep notes:

On the surface, sport does not seem to have a meaningful purpose since the sporting outcome does not produce anything. However, for the participant, sport gives psychological, social and health benefits...

(Slep, 1998, p.7)

It is clear that some participants valued sport because of cultural representations as 'good'. There was not a simplistic, universal notion of value, but the values mentioned centred on social and personal development, health and fitness, and social benefits. There was also a clear difference between the value of sport in general and that of sport participation. For example some participants valued sport as an activity, but qualified the value of participation in the activity. As this is so clearly linked to

the relevance of the activity and the way in which individuals identified with participation, I address this in the next chapter. There were common views of the particular purpose of sport and participants frequently commented on whether it had ever had a purpose for them or others, in the present or past. The participants had also constructed sport to have a different value for the adult and child life stage. These findings are consistent with those of Scott-Porter who showed ‘...a significant distinction between the definition of adult and children’s physical activity’ (2002; p.1). In the next chapter I examine this in detail.

4.3 CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING OF SPORT

By now it is clear that the participants’ constructions of sport were narrow and traditional. The main sources of these definitions were school and youth experiences, the media and participation of significant others. There was a sense that their childhood awareness of sport activities was limited to a range of traditional sport activities. However, some described how they developed awareness of other activities, particularly individual sports later. Broadcast media offered some window on other opportunities and a number of participants mentioned learning about other sports through avid television sport spectatorship, as children.

Watching football as a kid, I absolutely loved it...I used to also for a while go and watch speedway, motorcycle racing and probably would have considered that to be a sport, although when I got older I wouldn’t, but when I was a kid I would have said that was sport. Erm, wrestling because it was on World of Sport on a Saturday afternoon. Fencing, the stuff you get in the Olympics. Basically when I was a kid. I didn’t watch a lot of sports, but when there was an event, Wimbledon; I’d watch loads of tennis, when the Olympics were on, if I could get round school and if they weren’t on in the middle of the night I’d watch the swimming, judo and anything. But a week later there could have been another judo competition on or a tennis tournament and I wouldn’t have been interested. It was kind of round events. So it would be those kind of things that I would consider to be sport.

(John)

Sport spectatorship in some ways widened their view of sport, but in most ways reinforced that it was a competitive team based activity, with media coverage privileging a discourse of performance, over participation (Lake, 2001). For many their immediate sense of sport was still intrinsically linked to school and childhood participation experiences. They defined sport by childhood experiences of school

sport predominantly; this was also the case for those who had taken part in other activities which could be considered to be sport in adult life. Most participants were now aware of a wider range of possible sport activities either through media and popular coverage, or in many cases because of the participation of their children. Whilst they accepted these as sports activities, they did not tend to think of them within their concept of sport (possibly because they had not experienced them). Their childhood experiences were frequently drawn upon to illustrate their sense of what sport 'really is'.

Several of the participants noted that they now had an understanding of sport, as encompassing a wider range of activities because of awareness of facilities and programmes frequently through the participation of family. All the participants with children mentioned activities that their children participated in and several noted the difference to what was available when they were a child. Heather comments:

It's so different to how they are now. I mean my children always do so many clubs. [*My son's*] in the football development at NUFC... my children go to the summer camps....

(Heather)

Several had a personal view of sport, restricted to the limited range of activities available to them as a child, even though they recognised that 'now they sort of try like to supply a range of things, don't they' (Clare). However, for others introduction to other activities did give them a wider sense of what sport could be, as John and Kate's comments illustrate:

As an adult my experiences of participating in sport were a lot more positive...either I'm not taking part with people who are as competitive as the children that I used to compete with, I used to take part in sport with were or maybe people mellow as they get older, people's attitudes change. It's fairly rare for me to play football for example with somebody who's so competitive that they can't deal with the fact that I'm not particularly fit or my abilities aren't up to the standard they might want.

(John)

"I suppose getting married, my husband would probably have had a big influence on the kind of things I do he would be the biggest influence, so I would never have gone fishing I don't think, unless or I would never have done kayaking.

(Kate)

Participants showed a changing sense of the range of activities available because of others' suggestions or support. John's comments show how the different range of activities and contexts played in provided a base for an alternative view of sport. However, he like others did not fully embrace this view of sport. John was not alone in having different experiences of sport in adult life. Heather, likewise had a changing view of sport, asking variously 'Is it classed, are they classed as a sport do you think, all of those?' and 'I never quite know whether they are, or whether it's more sort of?...' In all these cases the sense of 'Real sport' persisted, one of performance, competition, achievement, winning and in some views, exclusion and power. This view may have been based on the fact that the activities they were involved in were not mainstream sports, but several participated in mainstream sports and still held this view.

Turning to constructions of sport centring on value of the activity, it was clear that this was not always linked to experience. Several participants had negative experiences of sport, but still understood sport to have the potential for positive benefit. In this sense they seemed to be influenced by a number of discourses, as they commented on the views of 'they' which variously meant, 'teachers', 'media', their past PE teachers, their children's PE teachers. This notion of the impact of 'experts' is not new. Smith and Parr noted that:

...these views on health were, for the most part, based not on pupil's practical experiences of PE, but on conversations with teachers and the impressions they had formed from mass media and government pronouncements (DCMS, 2000; DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002).

(Smith & Parr, 2007, p.46).

4.4 CONCLUSION

Whilst I encouraged the participants to give their own definition of sport and physical activity, imagining that this might be different to the narrow definitions used in quantitative surveys of sport participation, in fact a narrow and 'old' definition persists among my middle-aged sample. Perhaps the age group is adrift of the

possible cultural change, impacting on sport perception among younger age groups.⁴ Coalter argues that a cultural change has occurred and that the meaning of sport may be changing. He links the old view of sport with characteristics which are ‘...compulsory, regimented, hierarchical, authoritarian, gendered and essentially exclusive...’, whilst ‘new sports’ are ‘...largely individual, freely chosen, based on task orientation and intrinsic motivation’ (2004, p.81).

In truth despite the fairly rigid meaning of sport to them, a widening of participation among the participants I spoke to was apparent, with more informal and casual participation. However, this is not reflected in any re-definition in the ‘constitutive essence of sport’ (Sieppel, 2006). Coalter calls for a redrafting of the definition of sport, as has essentially happened in sports development and policy, with his claim that a:

...shift to more individualistic, flexible and fitness- orientated activities signals the decline of sport, or at least the redrawing of the traditional boundaries and meanings of sport.

(Coalter, 1999, p.37)

However, I would contend that the old definitions and meanings of sport remain remarkably persistent among the middle aged interviewees. ‘Real sport’ was about performance, competition, achievement, winning and in some views, exclusion and power. Interviewees placed other exercise and recreation on the periphery of sport. Back in 1990, Seaton said that ‘the new physical culture is about health, fun, pleasure and wider participation – a new horizon of choice and opportunity’ (p.31). Certainly, there were some alternative or wider views of sport and some questioning of the narrower view. However, I would assert that there may be a difference between participation in activities, labelled by others as ‘new sports’ and the understanding of them in these terms. In fact the definition of activities that constituted sport was tight, but there was evidence of some questioning whether it could be looser.

My findings reflect a fairly homogenous although not singular, meaning of sport? Dominant meanings, based on definitions of sport were evident, largely influenced by the privileged position of a discourse of sport as ‘...competitive team games and

⁴ Several authors have questioned whether a change in sport definition has actually occurred at all (Hunt et al, 2001; Lake, 2001 among others).

personal performance...'(Lake, 2001; p.87). However, essentially meanings can be split into two groups – those that focus on the essence and characteristics of the activity; and those that look at the value and purpose of it. Participants held both in different combinations.

The way in which the person defines sport is clearly important as elsewhere in the data it is evident that it determines how relevant and important the activity is to them. Therefore, to understand engagement in sport and physical activity it is important to look at the way people construct themselves in relation to sport. The meaning given to sport cannot be separated from the values and identities associated with the activity, so I will explore this. In the next chapter I will contend that the meaning of sport is important, as it has an impact on whether the individual is 'in or outside' of sport. It is perhaps fairly prosaic, but participation seems to all be about meaning and the middle-age group have been neglected in research.

CHAPTER 5

ENGAGEMENT WITH SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE: SELF-IDENTITY ISSUES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The rationale and reasons given by the participants for sport and physical activity participation were multiple. There were some common reasons for childhood participation in sport; sport being a compulsory part of schooling, gaining friends through sport, being encouraged by teachers and parents, and learning health, fitness and social status benefits of sport, which echoed the findings of previous studies¹. However, during adult life participation was more complex, characterised by various tracks of continuity, withdrawal and rekindling among participants and in some cases late starting. Looking across the rationales provided for this participation, the impact of self-identity concerns, life stages and competency issues were apparent and these areas are the focus of this chapter.

This chapter focuses on the relationship between the meaning of sport, being a sport participant and the changes in this across the life course. I will unravel how the individuals' participation and their decisions about participation related to the meanings of the activity, leading on from Chapter 4, and the value attributed to these meanings within their overall lives. The personal meanings of sport influence the individual's participation as they inform the relevance of the activity and its significance to their personal identities (Lake, 2001). It will be demonstrated that the relevance, attractiveness and appropriateness of sport and physical activity to senses of self and personal goals, (Coakley & White, 1992) had a critical influence on my participants' participation. What and who is important to an individual at the time, the meaning of the activity, and the value of this activity as part of their life have a key impact and it is this which I will explore further.

¹ See for example Daley and O'Gara, 1998; Hills, 2007; Kremer et al, 1997; Mason, 1995; Sallis et al, 2000, Yang et al, 1996.

I begin the chapter by examining the ideologies held about sport persons, many of these match the conventional understanding of sport, demonstrated in Chapter 4. I then consider how the individuals related themselves to sport; some fitted the mainstream notion of the stereotypical sport person description, whilst others did not. There is a tension between the participants' view of themselves and the stereotypes of the sports person as youthful, male and highly committed to competitive sport. Participants formed a range of identities in relation to sport and physical activity, and these findings are interpreted as conformist and oppositional identities. I also explore individuals who simultaneously conform by participating in sport, yet set themselves apart and resist dominant descriptions of the sports person.

Following on from this I discuss the management of self-identity linked to sport, across the life course. I explore the usefulness of the activity in life, participation turning points, expected and unexpected transitions and in particular participants' concerns regarding competence. Tension between the sport role and an increasing number of roles and responsibilities in adult life are identified. I end by signposting pertinent issues from the interpretation of identity management which are evidently associated with the participants' negotiations of a move into midlife, which I go on to explore in Chapter 6.

5.2 IDEOLOGIES OF THE SPORTS PERSON

The following discussion centres on the participants' ideas on what a sports person was like. Sport was associated with particular types of people and characteristics; this was linked to the definition of the activity in their overall conceptual understanding. The dominant ideas which emerged from this research, about people involved in sport are: young and male; competitive, physically skilled and fit; has a life dominated by sport; participates for the sport itself; and takes their sport participation seriously. These comments also point to the significance that the participants placed on sports persons being involved in traditional notions of mainstream sport, expectations of significant commitment, and the importance placed on sport in their lives.

A sports person....

5.2.1 ...is young and male

Overall the participants perceived that people involved in sport were more likely to be young and male and this is not dissimilar to previous findings (Coakley & White, 1992; Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Wimbush, 1988). Most of the interviewees suggested that sports participants tended to be young. For instance Jane explained her view that sports persons:

...tend to sort of be very fit, wandering around with the big tracksuits on all the time and the trainers. Erm, usually sort of younger people, sort of you know sort of have a have a young outlook on life, even if they're older, still keep a younger aura about them. They tend to be terribly preoccupied with it, with sport.

(Jane)

The phrases 'I was young and I was agile and I was fit then anyway', '...they were all really young...and they were really keen', '...when you're young you tend to run about a lot more...' provide insights into the way in which participation was associated with those of younger ages. Leading on from this, being involved in sport was associated less with those of middle age. For example Craig when describing people involved in sport commented: 'How would I compare them? Probably younger, thinner, (*he laughs*) with more time.'

Similarly comments such as: 'No, oh no. I think I'm too old...', '...when I got older running around does not interest me' and '...you start playing golf when you're too old to play football' illustrate further the association of youth with sport participation. This reiterates the findings of previous work like Grant (2001) who commented that "...many older people had learned physical activity 'wasn't for older people' (2001, p.786).

In contrast, those still active in sport tended not to comment on a normal age for sport participants. For instance whilst Keith has become involved in the organisation of sport as he has aged, his participation has also continued, thereby challenging the dominant ideology that regular participation is the domain of the young, as he said:

...my interests, far from diminishing I guess at a younger age you think as you get older your interest in sport will diminish but I have found exactly the opposite, my interest in

sport and my increasing my involvement may have been less than it was as a child but in some ways if there was a curve it would have done this. Had a lowish point here in terms of involvement and then rising again through these year so I found my involvement was actually increasing...

(Keith)

Other authors have argued that sport participation is often associated with men (Coakley & White, 1992; Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Green et al, 1990) and masculine ideals (McKay et al, 2000; Smith, 2000). The participants in my study drew a link between sport and "...ideals of our culture...toughness, physical strength and the importance of aggressive competitiveness" (Smith, 2000; p.188). However, my participants did not make an explicit association between sport characteristics and masculinity, and sport with boys and men unlike Smith (2000) and others (see Bramham, 2003; Hasbrook & Harris, 2000; Parker, 1996). However, some of the male participants when describing feeling excluded from sport activities, talked about the expectation that they should be good at sport. A few of the women talked of the non-feminine attributes of participants and sports teachers remembered from their childhood. Jane's view shows her association of sport with masculinity:

It was just such a vicious game to me. Just people running around me, big, butch, girls in my year at school, who were always far tougher than me, sort of hurling these hockey balls around, oh and I just hated it.

(Jane)

There was also a common view that men tended to be more competitive and that more girls tried to avoid PE, than boys.

It became clear that the women I interviewed were also less likely to expect to be a sports person. This is consistent with suggestions that females may believe there are choices to be made between a feminine identity or sport (Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Scraton, 1987; Scraton & Flintoff, 1992) and that they learn that sport is not expected of them (Coakley, 2003). They told stories about their experiences where they had felt less encouraged in sport than boys, and this is supported by Bramham who demonstrated that both boys and girls typically thought 'It's a boy thing: liking school PE' (2003, p.59). More vividly, some explained how they felt being a sports person was incompatible with being a mother. However, this latter point was less about the ideology of sport participant definition and more about feelings of entitlement to participation. I discuss this latter point in chapter 6. Several of the

participants talked about a common interest in sport among men, and this was something that many of the women and some of the men felt excluded from. However, only Rachel and Kate talked explicitly about how they felt that sport was more compatible with males. Rachel gave her opinion on men and sport:

I remember I have a real thing about, especially for men, that it's actually an important part of their life and I find this very frustrating, like for example if we were watching a film on a Saturday afternoon which sometimes we did and my Dad would come in and turn it over to get the golf or the football results, that really used to irritate me but it was 'oh it's the football results end of story' it was more important because it was football and golf. My husband is exactly the same. It's like you can organise something but 'it's football and there's no argument', 'it's just football' so it's got to come first. When I was at university in X [*a country*], in X a lot of the men were like there, it was primarily football, but sport you know, nothing comes in the way of that. And I think it's got an importance for them that is out of all proportion to the fact that I think it's a game, or an activity, or a hobby, but they don't have that. So I think part of my negativity towards it comes from that...I think [*my husband*] has always been interested in sport, like when he was a boy he would be out every night, he was in the Boys Brigade and he was in the band and played football and there's photos of him, all these childhood photos of him in the football teams and I think for men particularly it's a very social experience. I always remember at one of the hospitals I worked at they played football and it was such a great social environment that you would have the consultants and the porters out there playing football together. And for women I don't think it's the same. I think for men it's a real watch or play football, it's a very bonding experience. You know we'll go on nights out with people from my work and there's husbands that [*my husband*] doesn't know and they'll sit and talk about football all night and I suppose that's quite a good thing. So it's like a common interest. I mean not all men like it, but for those that do it's a common interest.

(Rachel)

Whilst Rachel is explicit about this, other participants suggested that men have, and are meant to have, a different relationship with sport. Some of the women described that men had an absorbed relationship with sport, based on their experience of significant others, as Rachel exemplifies when she says about men and sport '...you know nothing comes in the way of that'. It was clear that some of the women felt that sport participation was not really expected of girls. They described situations where they received less support from teachers and noted that they did not have access to some of the sports of which female versions are popular today, typically most of the women lamented that girl's football had not been available during their school PE era. Some comments and stories highlighted the notion of sports which were, or were not, "sufficiently feminine" (Gibson & Pennington-Gray, 2005, p.451). Kate described at length her enjoyment of football in childhood, both in and out of primary school, where she was encouraged to play in a mixed team, in contrast to

high school where this was discouraged. Whilst Rachel appears to accept the association between sport and males, Kate questions it:

...at primary school we played football. I went to a very small primary school, rural primary school, quite old fashioned...So all the girls played football. We all played football and it was all quite natural and [pause] so I quite enjoyed football at school, at primary school. But then when we moved to secondary school emm [pause] then the gender difference was far more obvious...

(Kate)

So Kate was among a number of women who had developed a sense that sport was less for women and more for men from their experiences at school.

5.2.2...is competitive, physically skilled and fit

These findings reflect the dominant ideologies linked to sport participation and likewise the views on participation of the sports person accentuate the competitive and physically hard aspects prevalent in past literature. They played up regular participation, high fitness, talent, skill and achievement levels as the following comments illustrate:

I associate the adjective sporty with people who are possibly competitive, probably fairly fit, probably organised in their physical fitness regimes and I would usually attribute that adjective to people who had maybe a talent for some kind of sports and probably people who are involved in some kind of organised competitive activity.

(John)

I suppose I would think of them as Jolly Hockey sticks, kind of thing. The ones who were on the A team, while I was languishing in the B team, the kind who were good at competitive ball games.

(Kate)

Kate's focus on the association with ball games was reiterated by comments from other participants, who associated the sports person first and foremost with team games. Craig talks of his struggle to accept those involved in individual and less physically active sports, in his definition of a sports person:

Yes I would classify them as sports [*individual sports*] but I don't see a golf man, a golf player as being sporty...Because it's back to what I was saying to you right at the very start. I don't think they push themselves physically, it's a mental game.

(Craig)

This association with traditional, competitive team sports was explored in Chapter 4, and shows that the notion of the sports person is based on a traditional British school model, with an emphasis on people who care about winning (Roberts, 1996a). Craig talked at length about his association of athletes with hard, physical work, 'physically pushing' the body, who 'end up in a sweat', training and competing several times a week. An ethic or ideology of achievement is displayed, with connotations of 'hard work', 'physical toil' (Smith, 2000) and an association with pain and discomfort (Lake, 2001). This is similar to Horne et al.'s summary of ideas such as "... 'hard work will lead to eventual success', 'stay on in there', 'no pain, no gain'..." (2001, p.149). Further to this, Clare's comments emphasise the dedication of the sports person:

I think that you've got to be quite dedicated, like you've got to be a dedicated sort of person and I suppose obviously if you enjoy it, it's not hard, yer know, but I think you've got to be like dedicated...I mean my idea of a sporty person is someone who does badminton, you know they're like, they don't just sort of go to keep-fit now and then and things. They sort of do everything two of three times a week, you know that's how I sort of think of it.

(Clare)

The link made between the sports person with regular participation and training is common across participants, highlighting the association with competitive and committed participation. This is similar to Stevenson's (1990) finding that the responsibilities of athletes for play and training were emphasised. This is further supported by Haggard and Williams who suggested that being a sports person "...implies certain identity images, for instance that one is physically fit, self-disciplined and motivated" (1992, p.3). Further more being a sports person was associated with current activity, rather than past play or experiences, among my participants.

5.2.3...has a life dominated by sport

It was evident from my participants that they viewed the sports person as someone whose participation affected the rest of their life, and made them stand out in comparison to non-participants. In particular, they noted that athletes dressed and behaved differently. They commented on the link between sport and social life for participants. Jane commented at length about this, making observations on her husband's colleagues who she suggested epitomise the sport person.

Going to running races and seeing all these people who just about live, eat and breathe running races. You know they go all over the country and that's what their life is, going all over the country to races and sort of taking part and all of their social life is involved with that as well...I can spot them at my husband's work as well...My husband just does it for pleasure, he doesn't get involved with that, but you can see them, they stick out like sore thumbs... I think it seems to take over their lives. They can't, they don't seem to just sort of slot it in, every now and then, it seems to be everything, you know all or nothing....

(Jane)

Undoubtedly her comparison of them to 'sore thumbs' highlights the common finding that sports persons are different from others, through the way in which they live, act, and dress. This categorisation of the sports person is linked to the widely held view that sports persons tend to be continually active and 'on the go', in contrast with a view of other people being more relaxed. Several of the participants talked about how they viewed the sports person as someone who plays, trains and spends most of their social time with other athletes. Comments such as 'major social outlet', 'we used to go with friends', 'a social thing', 'big part of ...social life' 'enjoying the social side' illustrate the notion of sport forming the basis of social life for athletes.

Indeed, the connotations of regular participation and the spin off into social life were linked to the importance that my participants perceived that athletes gave to the activity in their lives. Jane's comments presented earlier illustrate her belief that sporty people value sport so greatly that it is central to their lives. She said when commenting on sporty people, 'They were just very interested in it and they spent a lot of time doing it, people used to spend all their time and it became a main part of their life.' Others commented on how athletes' lives were 'consumed' or 'dominated' by sport, as evident in the views of some of them on their own sport participation (see later commentary on p.149). Overall, the way in which participants related to the idea of 'what sporty people are like' was based on viewing them as very frequent and regular participants, and a sense that they would always be playing, watching and talking about sport and that it would be "their life".

This finding is supported by previous research on athletic identity. Martin et al. found that "An individual with a strong athletic identity has a self schema built upon being an athlete and processes information from an athletic perspective" (1995, p.114). Many of my participants described a sport person as someone who thinks

about everything from a sports perspective. They commented on the deep commitment to sport and this is similar to the notion of giving up alternatives (Becker, 1960; Sheldon, 1971) and building an exclusive identity from the sport role, to the detriment of the development of other aspects of self (Lavelle & Robinson, 2007). They expect people around the sports person will define them as a sports person (Horton & Mack, 2000).

5.2.4...participates for the sport itself

Part of the dominant ideology of sports persons is also about why they participate in sport. A number of participants suggested that sporty people enjoyed activity and participated for the process, rather than because they felt they needed to or should do. Rachel described those who take part in sport as interested in the activity as she says:

They tend to be fit and motivated and interested in sport and they're actually taking part in sport or physical exercise in that way. Lots of energy usually. And yes it's more the participation, it's about participation... they enjoyed doing it and they were motivated to do it.

(Rachel)

It was frequently asserted that people who were sports persons 'enjoy doing' sport and take part in 'enjoyable exercise'. Several of the participants contrasted the sports persons choice to participate for enjoyment with their own sense of compulsion to exercise for other reasons such as fitness. In fact Keith's comment illustrates the distinction drawn between sporty people and those who are exercisers:

...someone who actually played and participated in organised sport on a regular basis and was sort of committed with what went along with that in terms of getting fit and keeping fit and practicing and training and whatever else. So I suppose I would draw a distinction then between someone who's sporty and someone who's fit. There are a large number of students who would either use the fitness suite or go to the fitness and exercise classes, I'm not sure what word I would use for them but I'm not sure I would see them as sporty necessarily, more committed to fitness.

(Keith)

The commitment to sport itself is evident in the expectation that sports persons would be more focused on the activity, participation, and performance, rather than on any fitness outcome. Some also referred back to the association between participating in sport during physical education and enjoyment, for example in Peter's comments:

Yeah, well my Dad used to say ‘Well, that’s supposed to be the time when you enjoy yourself’ I’d have rather been in a maths lesson, not that I was a swot or that good at school, but I’d rather have a lesson where you didn’t have to do that.

(Peter)

5.2.5...takes their sport participation seriously

Previous research has demonstrated that those who enjoy sport are more likely to be committed to it (Alexandris et al, 2002; Scanlan et al, 1993). However, the reasons for participation associated with the sportsperson are more complex. Across the participants it was clear that they perceived that the sports person was involved in serious play. Jane provides an example in her comments on sport persons based on her husband’s competitive focus;

...I enjoyed sport just by doing it, but he only enjoyed it actually by winning at the end of it, er and it had to be very serious, you couldn't have a laugh, where you just did a hit about. You had to play a game...

(Jane)

Many of the participants described people involved in sport, as pursuing this “...with the utmost seriousness” (Saunders, 1982; p.127). At the same time Craig comments on the need to balance enjoyment with an appropriate commitment to competition, in the training and preparation associated with this, when he says:

I had always believed that if you enjoyed your sport too much, if you saw it too much like fun, then you couldn’t get better so there was a balance, and when I was in X I suppose I hit the balance, when I came to X I thought the balance was lost. But it wasn’t to the benefit of getting better.

(Craig)

Craig’s comment illustrates a possible tension between sport as enjoyment, and as serious competition. A number of participants emphasised both aspects, showing that enjoyment arises from competitive achievement and that serious involvement can be fun. However, Craig’s concerns show that serious training and play were viewed as being of greater importance. Jane’s comment earlier, also show her sense that competition is essential to the sports person, and that they will be annoyed if others spoil this. This interpretation is supported by Bramham (2003) who showed that many boys resented those who did not engage seriously with Physical Education and therefore spoilt lessons.

This is similar to findings that people perceive sports persons are most concerned with competing, winning and achieving (Bramham, 2003; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). These connotations of serious involvement were associations with sustained and committed participation and this is not dissimilar to explanations of 'serious leisure' (Stebbins, 2007) and findings on competitive athletes (Hastings et al, 1995; Siegenthaler & Leticia Gonzalez, 1997; Stevenson, 1990). This reflects the notion of sports persons as those who take the activity seriously as 'amateurs and hobbyists' in contrast to 'dabblers' who are engaged in casual leisure (Stebbins, 2007, p.6 & 18). My participants suggested that the sports person focuses on the importance of achievement through competition and skill development (Hastings et al, 1995). Ultimately Jane's comments summarise the common view that athletes viewed "...sport as an exercise and an enjoyment thing as well as a competitive thing." However, whilst the sports person may enjoy satisfaction from competition and achievement, this was not about the type of 'fun' or any kind of 'involvement associated with non-traditional sports' (Tomlinson et al, 2005; p.7).

Overall the findings discussed so far illustrate that my participants viewed sporty people as very committed and actively participating in competitive sport on a regular basis and suggested that they tended to be young and male. There was a sense that sport became central to the 'sporty' persons' life, that they took their play seriously whilst enjoying the activity, and that they lived, dressed and acted differently. These latter comments fit into how they had constructed a view of sport participants, based on dominant ideologies. They had absorbed a traditional view of the sport role and culturally defined norms and expectations. They articulated a view of the 'particular front' (Goffman, 1971, p.37), norms and rules of behaviour expected for the established social role and the traits and attributes desirable in sport sub-culture (Giddens, 1984).

5.3 SELF DEFINITION AS A SPORT PERSON?

The relation of sport to self is considerable throughout the interviews. Whether sport gave meaning to the participants' lives and whether sport was part of the way they

construed themselves was evident (Yair, 1990). The participants' view of self identity in relation to sport was informed by their personal experiences of sport and the ideologies they held about 'the sports person'. Overall, four identity types were apparent among the participants in this study: 'sporty', 'active', 'sport participant, but 'I can't say it's been my life', and 'not-sporty'.

5.3.1 'Yes, I'm sporty'

In explaining why they competed in sport, several of the participants explained how sport was central to who they were. They referred to themselves as a 'sports person' or 'sporty' or in terms of single sports for example as a 'runner', citing their participation, interest in, enjoyment of sport and importance within their lives as characterising their identity. They identified themselves as competitive and maintained regular play in sport and training for the activity. For Andy, Craig, Emma, Keith and Phil sport had great significance in their lives. For example Keith who had played football and other sports for most of his life, suggested:

Yes I suppose I would, [*think of himself as sporty*]...in that I enjoy participating in sport and that I'm interested in sport as well so if that's what sporty means then I think yes I would say I was sporty, I enjoy sport, I enjoy keeping fit, its an important part of my life... It was just always very high on the agenda really and it always took priority...Yes, I kind of remember you know getting into school early in order to play football and practice and so on. And you know every break time and lunch time whenever possible we'd be out on the playing fields playing football and I think it was that kind of culture where probably most of the lads would do but for many it was somewhat under sufferance but for me it was what I wanted to do all the time...Yes I am very interested in sport, probably for just about for as long as I can remember I always have been...I would kind of have to say as I think of myself, who I am, my identity, sport is very much wrapped up in it and it kind of always, I mean for as long as I can remember I've been involved in sport, its part of who I am really and how I sort of define myself.

(Keith)

Undoubtedly Keith identifies himself as a sport person and the continuity of this sense of self is evident in his comments about the endurance of his involvement, suggesting that the self-identity is a trajectory across his life (Giddens, 1992).²

² Keith talks of changes to his sport identity with his participation developing into a professional career recently and this move into a work identity associated with his sport identity, might be partly a midlife transition driven concern to seek out the maximum career success. I discuss the midlife transition in chapter 6.

Many of the participants strongly identified with sport and this could be seen in the comments they made, such as 'glued' to, 'life revolved around', 'subsuming', and 'obsessed', about participation which illustrated the extent of their commitment and involvement. They suggested that sport had been a 'significant part of my life', or had an 'immense effect'. These participants had participated throughout childhood and much of their adult life, sometimes in single sports and other times in a range of activities, often training and playing intensely and in all these cases their comments suggest they had been very competitive. They gave various reasons for their continued participation, but these centred on their enjoyment of competition and success; feeling suited to the activity and for some a sense that participation was 'natural' and familiar.

Those who had a sense of sport identity also described themselves as competitive and this included competing against others and themselves. Some expressed a reluctance to admit that they were competitive (which I come to later), however others were open about their competitive spirit. This was in line with the mainstream notion of sport being competitive (Beal, 2001; Coakley, 2003; Green et al, 2005, Roberts, 2003) as held by these participants. For example:

... I enjoy doing things that are competitive but I am competitive by nature and I find that when I am walking and there is somebody up ahead I want to catch them up...

(Phil)

I like being involved I play competitively and I like to win but that's not what it's all about. I've played and lost many years for lots of teams. But every game you go out and you try and win every game, you start again...

(Andy)

...I mean I was competitive then, but I didn't see it as any great, I mean you wanted to win when you're in a team game, you do want to win when you're at school. But it was never the be all and end all if we lost the match, it was never like ohhhh, we just got on with the next one and try and win the next one...

(Emma)

The desire to seek success was evident and this was often about developing identities valued by others which I explore later (Stevenson, 1990). Indeed, viewing oneself as competitive and the importance of striving to win is grounded in the competitive ideology of the mainstream sports person (Coakley, 2003) and does not encompass a 'participatory ideology' (Tomlinson et al, 2005; p.7). The quote, from Emma, in fact

illustrates this different theme, typical among many of the other participants who although not describing themselves as sport persons, did participate. Participation and having fun was more important than competition, for example ‘Y’know the racing came second to the sailing, and they know that...’ (Peter). However, in the main those who were competitive did find that playing and winning at sport was still most important. This was exemplified by their descriptions of the impact of losing or winning on their emotional state. Keith’s comments illustrate this:

I think over the years it’s probably given me some of the highest highs and some of the lowest lows and particularly with the football team when we get beat I can just feel so gutted and my whole mood for a weekend or even a week until the next game can be influenced by how the match has gone.

(Keith)

This is a common sentiment with sports fans (for example Gibson, 2002b), but in this case it applied to actual participation.

These participants were ‘serious’ about their play. They trained hard and played regularly, seeing fitness and competitive spirit as key to winning. However, none of the participants talked about competition in aggressive or ‘cut-throat’ terms, instead extolling the importance of winning and their competitive strength as a natural desire or will which resulted in spirited play. In fact their competitive nature was also about taking pride at being fitter than others. For instance Craig said:

I was asked to...do a test on fitness and...she tested out professionals. She had a professional footballer, a professional rugby league player, myself, and a runner, and a professional cyclist and all of these 5 or 6 she did anaerobic and aerobic tests and apparently I came out top on anaerobic...

(Craig)

Dionigi (2004) and Grant (2001) found that senior athletes qualified the nature of their competitiveness in a similar way.

In addition to a continued sense of being competitive, many of those involved in sport suggested that they had always been ‘physical’, commenting at times on their ability and physical suitability. Phil acknowledges the continuation of his physical sense of self when he said:

I suppose sporty I don't know, is something physical as well, about your build and flexibility and in that sense I am fairly sporty. I have got an athletic physique, I am fairly mobile and flexible. I could do most things in that sense, so sporty in that sense. ... in the sense that I could more or less play any sport... If somebody said now, 'will you play in a 5 a side football match', I might not be any good but I would play. A game of tennis well I'm not very good, but I can knock a ball about and just about get by. The only sport I have never played is squash.

(Phil)

The sense of being able in multiple sports was apparent for all those who had at times been heavily involved in sport. Keith provides an example of a typical view that the involvement continues on naturally from early involvement in sport.

I suppose partly background, I'm not sure it was in my blood but you know that kind of feeling its just always been around [*football*] was the game I felt most familiar with most comfortable with, and I know most enjoyed, and I felt competent at as well. So football certainly was the biggie, I remember as well really getting into running and cross-country and middle distance running.

(Keith)

Keith said he came from a family where on his '...father's side of the family there was a whole sort of footballing tradition...' and as a child he was encouraged to compete. Likewise the other 'competitors' cited family encouragement from any early age. This can be understood in terms of primary socialisation. The family influence on primary physical skills acquired, means that they may come to define themselves as a sports person when they are young (Kay, 2004). Giddens talks of '...routine and commitment' (1991, p.196) and the learning of societal rules and norms from family encouragement can be understood in this context. Where sport participation is valued by others this can be the basis of social identity, as the individuals emulate and model their behaviour on others (Kay, 2004; Scheerder et al, 2006; Stevenson, 1990). Sport may become a 'way of life' and Kay (1999) comments on sporting families where parents provide practical support and value sport, in turn stimulating the child's participation. In particular Keith's comments that sport was in his 'blood', reflect a clear sense of continued physical identity in sport. This suggests a perception of a natural tendency to be competitive, whilst others commented on being a natural type, shape and having inherent ability in sport.

Several of the participants suggested that sport had been particularly important in their lives so far. They spoke of the value they placed on their involvement, and this was exemplified by the emotional impact of sport, with some describing their

experiences as the ‘happiest’ days of their life, which had an ‘immense effect’ on them. The importance they placed on sport was evident in the large amounts of time spent playing and training, and their concern with how this impacted on other activities and relationships in their lives (more on this later). For example:

My life revolved around sport at that point again, and as a result of that I see that as a very happy time...It has had an immense effect I would think. My happiest memories are of sport I would think.

(Craig)

It was great because I enjoyed it and it didn't bother me that you had to stay behind after school because I wanted to do it. We used to do matches on a Saturday morning that didn't bother me. It was because I enjoyed it that I went on to do it.

(Emma)

...well it's always been important I don't think its changed I've always done it...There's never been a time when I haven't been involved in organised sport. I can't imagine me not doing that...for a whole variety of reasons you can build off into psychology here...

(Andy)

The importance of sport within their lives was demonstrated by the impact on other areas of their lives, such as social life and relationships. Nearly all described social lives entwined with sport, commenting on friendships that had lasted for years, and fun, social times with fellow athletes. As Phil says:

I think it's a really significant part of my life, really socially as well as the sort of sport element...I go out for a drink with them most Friday nights. It sounds a bit set in the ways, but I go out for a drink with them, it's nothing over the top, just a couple of hours and we socialise as well. We go out for meals occasionally and a lot of spouses don't particularly enjoy running.

(Phil)

At the same time the importance of sport in their lives was also evident in comments about ‘highs’, ‘lows’, ‘pressure’ and ‘obsession’. For some their time outside of school as a child had been dominated by formal and informal sports competition, as John described the “... unofficial kind of sporting activity when I was a kid was always of playing football for hours or running for hours or very, very long and nothing would stop us we were obsessed.” For others the importance of sport in their lives remains high, for example consider the comments of Craig:

...Erm I had long standing relationship with a girlfriend at the time. And I remember that she was very critical of us at the time, just simply because the whole thing was subsuming me. So obviously that was the effect of the pressure.

(Craig)

The findings demonstrated that although in the minority, some individuals identified themselves through the meaning of their sport involvement, forming a sense of 'who I am' through sport, and being identified by others as sport participants or athletes (Coakley and Donnelly, 1999; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2007). The participants demonstrated both a personal and social sense of self. They referred to the way they see themselves and how others see them (Clarke & Saunders, 1991) and this is based on Mead's construction of identity. Positive feedback from others was critical in confirming the sense of established identity (Atchley, 1989), whilst personal experiences refined the sense of self.

Overall the participants' relationships with sport can be understood from the perspective of classic approaches to identity: core self (Erikson, 1968), role person merger (Turner, 1956, 1978), identity salience theory (Stryker, 1980) and the 'presentation of self' (Goffman, 1971). Several of the participants had defined sport as a central or core part of their identity at some point in time (Erikson, 1968, p.19). They had come to view themselves as a 'sports person', rather than a person who does sport (Lavalley & Robinson, 2007; p.12). These particular participants were highly involved in, and had a sustained commitment to the sport role and this formed a major or salient part of their identity and a central life interest (Balague, 1999; Cardinal & Cardinal, 1997; Gibson, 2005; Kleine et al, 2006; Mennesson, 2000).

Likewise role merger can be used to understand where the sport participation sits within their overall sense of self, alongside other roles in life, and whether the individual would define themselves in relation to this (Kleine et al, 2006). The identity that the individual derives from the athletic or sport role depends on the degree to which they '...view him/herself as occupying the role of the athlete' (Brewer et al, 1993, p.3). The findings show that where this was a major source of identity it impacted on behaviour and choices in others areas of lives (Gibson, 2005; Kuentzel, 2000). The findings also indicated that the way in which the individual presented themselves to others through their sport involvement was internalised and

strengthened their identity. This can be understood as impression management, as they monitored and reflected on the reaction of others to their performance (Goffman, 1971). This was obviously important as confirmation of the 'required attributes' and the expected 'conduct and appearance' of the social role (Goffman, 1971, p.81).

Participants spoke of how much sport dominated their sense of 'who I am' and their lives (Kleine et al, 2006), in other words the relative importance of the role within the overall self definition. The participants spoke of sport as one part of their identity, alongside other roles. Whilst elite athletes may develop an exclusive identity to the detriment of other areas of the self (Dacyshyn 1999; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007), an amateur athlete might likewise suggest that 'Sport is the only important thing in my life' (Martin et al, 1995; p.120). For some of my participants sport had been subsuming and outside of working or studying had been their main life interest.

The sense for some of the participants, that sport was a significant part of their life, was based on lifelong involvement in sport or major tracts which had only ended in recent years. Some spoke of a natural sense of sporting ability, this was also reiterated in a justification of involvement in sport through a sentiment that they had always been that way inclined. Continuity theory (Atchley, 1989) can be applied to understand a continued sense involvement, as an attempt to preserve 'familiar strategies in familiar areas of life' (p.183). Participants who spoke of how sport had always been part of their life were illustrating the importance of fitting in with 'individual personal history' (Cohler, 1982, see Atchley, 1989; p.184) and in maintaining 'ontological security', by preserving social continuity (Giddens, 1984, pp.50 & 75). These considerations of the length of relationship with sport participation, lead me to consider the flexibility of the identity. Whilst traditional understandings of identity construction and management suggest that the focus is on developing a stable and continuous identity, a post modern approach emphasises the openness of modern society and the variety of options for identity creation (Giddens, 1992). Those participants that identified with sport described a relatively stable sense of self across time, with this identity formed at an early age (Roberts, 1999; Shaw et al., 1995; Stevenson, 1990). Whilst they participated in a narrower range of sport than in their childhood, the frequency of participation often in a single sport had

increased and this is supported by Curtis and White (1984). The findings also indicated the desire to maintain this identity and I consider this later in the chapter.

5.3.2 I'm a Sport participant but 'I can't say it's been my life'

There were other study participants, who although describing their participation in sport felt only a mild or past association with sport. In explaining their participation they spoke of how sport did not have an importance in their lives.

...as an interest it's always been the same, but...purely because of time etc. I don't feel like I'm a sports person anymore... I do err a little bit of running not a huge amount. I help with coaching at a rugby club, and I go occasionally out on a bike but very little in comparison to what I used to do.

(Craig)

No, 'I've enjoyed taking part in sport, but I can't say it's been my life.

(Jane)

Indifferent really. I didn't hate it and I definitely didn't love it.

(Heather)

No up and down. At certain times it's had little peaks or big peaks. For short periods big peaks and then it drops off rapidly... it's occasionally been a social thing or whatever but it's not of great importance.

(Ben)

Whilst they had been active in sport, these participants did not define themselves as sports persons because the role did not, or no longer formed a core part of their sense of self. This can be understood through the concept of identity salience hierarchy (Adler & Adler, 1989; Stryker, 1980). The commitment to the activity and identity derived from it and the likelihood of acting on this creates a weaker sense of self-definition in relation to sport. In these cases sport may be liked but not valued enough to engender a strong sense of association (Balague, 1999).

There was a clear difference between those who considered themselves to be 'participants' who enjoyed sport, but were not serious or committed to the activity and those who were committed to sport (Boas, 1992). Indeed, Zurcher's (1979) sense of role selection which has been applied by Gibson (2005) in her review of sport tourist behaviour could be useful here. Gibson (2005, p.200) taking a lead from

Zurcher (1979, 1970) describes leisure roles as ‘empheral’ roles in that they can be ‘temporary or peripheral’. For these individuals sport has either played a useful role for them in the past or does from time to time, but they do not see themselves in line with the expectations of the role identity (Callero, 1985). They are similar to the leisure participants Stebbins describes as ‘dabblers’ who have learnt the sport but participate irregularly (2007, p.18). A post modern perspective allows us to see these individuals making flexible choices to be involved in sport or otherwise as part of a fluid range of activity and identity choices, but without any sense of an anchor from the sport role (Giddens, 1992).

5.3.3 I’m active

A number of the study participants preferred to describe themselves as ‘active’ and they distinguished this as different to being a sport person. A few of the participants used both these self definitions to describe themselves, but several participants suggested that they were more active, than ‘sporty’. For example Phil explained:

I suppose I would in a way [*describe himself as a sport person*], I mean only in the sense I enjoy most outdoor activities walking, hiking and running so in that sense yes, not widely in terms of other sports, more active than sporty I would say.

(Phil)

All of the participants had been ‘active’ at some point and many described childhood’s full of physical activity. In adult life many had been active in a range of sports, including traditional and new, however it is clear that not all viewed the activities as sport. Whilst few people viewed themselves as ‘sporty’, at some point all of them viewed themselves as ‘active’ or as a person who ‘exercises’, in fact several made particular reference to the fact that they might not be ‘sporty’, but they were ‘active’.

In part this is a reflection of the different meanings attached to sport and physical activity by participants (Seippel, 2006). Being active was based on different activity to traditional sport, typically non-competitive recreational or fitness activity, outdoor activity or activity in everyday life; walking to work, cleaning and cooking. However, Phil’s comment, as a successful competitive veteran runner, shows that he

does not consider his intense involvement in the sport of athletics and outdoor activities to be truly sport, preferring to label himself as a 'runner' and as generally active. Typically the narrow and restricted definition of sport influenced the likelihood that participants would define themselves as sports persons. Many suggested that their preferred physical activities were not encompassed within their view of sport. As Clare said:

I used to do keep fit. I used to go to like a step class and things, but I sort of stopped that after sort of two years erm but that's all I mean I never sort of saw it as sport in general I just saw it as keep fit.

(Clare)

Some like Clare, were describing participation in health and fitness, and outdoor activities which they did not deem to be sport. In fact some of the interviewees had been regular participants in sport activities at school, or were regular participants now, but they viewed themselves as active, referring to keep fit activities, exercise, or recreation rather than associating themselves with sport. They suggested that they participated in sport, but for fun, social and fitness purposes and so did not define themselves as a sports person. This was linked to their conception of sport as competitive, team games and confirms traditional definitions of sport (e.g. Loy, 1968).

The majority of these participants described their participation as non-competitive and it was clear they considered sporty people to be competitive. For example Peter explained how involvement in a competitive sport, without a competitive spirit meant that he was active, as he said, "I would say I'm active but not sporty. Because to me you have to have a competitive edge to be sporty." Another example is Kate who was adamant that she preferred not to use the label sport, for the activities (which included sports) which she participated in, when she said, "Well I would rather use the word physical activity". She went on to say that she would never have considered herself as a sport participant, because she was not involved in team sports and never felt competent in them. She felt more comfortable with describing herself as 'active' and here we can see that her non-identification with sport and with being 'active' instead was established early on.

It would appear that those who participated in a wide range of physical activities and/or in sport just for fun, viewed themselves as active and that this was a long established identity. Defining themselves as individuals who participate for 'fun' and also in order to learn an activity shows participants distinguishing themselves as 'dabblers' or 'learners' (Stebbins, 2007, p.18), rather than fully fledged sports persons. In this way the participants appear to construct an identity which plays on 'not fitting' with their view of a sport person as competent and competitive in sports. As Lake comments:

...participation in competitive team sports for the purpose of sporting achievements is taken to be more 'legitimate' than other forms of participation ...since sporting ability is socially desirable, it is used as a means of differentiating identity and this operates to detract from the social significance of alternative modes of participation.
(Lake, 1998, p.11 & 155)

However, if participants align themselves with being 'active' as an alternative, they can be involved in sport without having to live up to others expectations of a sport person, as they avoid a performance orientated identity (Goffman, 1952).

At the same time the participants comments imply that this is a clearly different identity to a sports person, thus showing some similarities to oppositional discourses to mainstream sport participation, such as 'lifestyle sports' (Chaney, 1996). Central to their definition of themselves is the notion of being 'active' and being a participant, as opposed to being a competitor. This is supported by Tomlinson et al's arguments that the identity related to lifestyle sports had meanings '...beyond...success in competition' and stressed 'fun', 'involvement', 'self-actualisation' (2005, p.2 & 7). There was a sense that my participants decided which part of the activity is of value to them and stress this, in this case being active, their preferred label was 'active'.

The option to be involved in different physical activities reflects Giddens (1992) comments on the diversity of lifestyle options and the choice reflects an identity decision. However, whilst self-description as 'active' can be seen as a different identity and in some senses oppositional to 'sporty', stressing as it does participation rather than performance, it does not suggest the challenge to sport identity, that lifestyle sport identity has posed. After all, some participants described themselves as

both 'sporty' and 'active', suggesting that both identities can be comfortably held. There is no sense that the participants are trying to challenge or reinterpret the way of seeing sports persons and present themselves as different to this. There is also some sense of this being an alternative identity, but with some suggestion that this might be presented as a compensation for 'not being sporty'. Frequently when asked whether they considered themselves to be 'sporty', those who did not would often immediately talk about how they 'might not be sporty, but were active', they would return to say however that they were not sporty and could not fit this identity, suggesting that perhaps they viewed being 'active' of secondary status in others eyes. The findings also indicate two other important aspects to viewing oneself as 'active'. Comments suggested that being 'active' was socially acceptable, perhaps more so than being 'sporty' and this is a key point which I will return to later. Some of the comments also imply wider connotations of being physically 'active', about busy lives and I will pick up on this later.

5.3.4 I just wouldn't see myself as sporty

There were other participants who did not describe themselves as sporty or active, although a number were. The non-identification with sport was because they felt they did not fit their own definitions of a sports person. For a number of these participants there was an overall sense of being unsure about 'sport' and feeling as though they were an 'outsider' to this type of activity. This related to the ideas about people who are 'sports persons' explored earlier, as 'not being a sporty type' was a typical response and this is similar to the findings on non-participation in some previous studies (Lake, 2001; Sports Council & HEA, 1992). They spoke about how their own involvement in physical activity did not involve structured sport, with high levels of play or came about through facilitating family activity rather than their own, and how they lacked fitness and ability which they viewed as requirements for the sports person. For example, Heather does not define herself as a sports person because she does not participate in structured and organised activity, as she says "... 'I' don't sort of specifically go out to do anything."

For participants the sense of what a sports person is, was established early on and in parallel the definition of themselves as a sport person or not. It was shown in Chapter

4 that the participants' view of sport was clearly tied to memories of PE and youth sport, where sport was associated with a narrow range of activities. This view of sport as being an activity for others starts early, as previous research also shows:

For many young people, PE and extracurricular activities are viewed as only for those who are able, gifted and 'sporty' and they are subsequently turned off to physical activity.

(Daley, 2002; p.27)

Acceptance by others and more pertinently confirmation of the individual's status as a sports person is critical to a secure sport identity (Donnelly and Young, 1988). In this way the participants looked back at their past participation, by way of early and school sport experience, and considered this through others eyes and found themselves lacking. For example John had the following to say when asked about whether he saw himself as a sports person in childhood and as an adult:

Erm, by my definition of sporty then no, I wasn't. I played for a couple of teams, again it was always football and I swam for the school on one occasion. But it was usually when there was nobody else to do it. Again I ran cross-country for the school but I remember it was because other people were ill and they needed a team, so I got called up to do it then. But I was never sort of part of the elite sportsmen group within the school... I still wouldn't consider myself sporty [*now as an adult*] erm I'm not sporty, but I'm probably average. My attitudes towards sport has changed. I'm now somebody who will do certain amounts of sport, but not structured sport.

(John)

Also Rachel suggested that she does not have the attributes required to be a sports person, "I don't particularly enjoy it, I'm not very fit or athletic or gifted at sport..."

The view of competence was based on their past experiences, and had its roots in their school experiences. Some had memories of being particularly able at sports, whilst others felt they were 'no good at it'. In a school culture where a traditional model of sport prevailed and frequently a Grammar school where this was magnified, "...not to do sport was counter both to the culture and the ethos of the school" (Wright et al, 2003; p.24) and this pressure was greater for boys. In essence I would add that 'not to be competent' was counter to a culture which valued achievement, particularly among boys, and these concerns about competence had a lasting effect.

There was a clear distinction between those who considered themselves to be personally competent at sport, and others who felt they did not have the physical skills, ability, or physique necessary to play. Some were excluded by peers or had received such negative feedback that they avoided or managed their participation, keeping to activities that they felt more comfortable with. For example:

Because I'm born in July so like some people were like 10 months older than I was which I think made a lot of difference because I'm 35 years old now and I'm still quite small. So *I always regarded myself as small* so when we played sport *I was always guaranteed never to be chosen*, the lads would not choose me.

(Rob)³

I think *I wasn't passing the ball* or something, some other girl told us I wasn't passing the ball (laughs) but *they didn't pick us anymore*...so miffed.

(Jackie)

Because I was made to do it and *I wasn't very good at it*. *I wasn't part of the group*, the crowd there whatever, not being a very social person...I didn't know anybody there apart from my brother...and I was made to go...

(Ben)

I was quite open minded and thought I would enjoy it, but quickly found out that *I was useless at it*...And erm...erm so *I actually hated it, absolutely hated it*...We had three hours hockey on a Wednesday afternoon and the girls, the good team got the coaching and it was pretty obvious that those...who weren't terribly good were soon *shunted off* to a different pitch and.... games teacher never came near us and *we were just left* to dribble the ball and you know just fill in three hours of absolute boredom, *it was so boring*.

(Kate)

The view of competence was established from their early school experiences of sport. Sallis et al (2000) found that perceived physical competence was consistently associated with participation of children and adolescents. Many talked at length about their early senses of competence, and when talking about adult life made reference to how they still viewed themselves in the same way. Competence was central to identity confirmation as Kleiber argues "The development of skills (and mastery) is an important part of the role leisure plays in identity formation" (1999, p.106). Those who feel they are able to master an activity will increase their commitment to it, whilst those who feel incompetent will feel a sense of exclusion,

³Italics are used here to illustrate participants' exclusionary incidents and self-appraisal of incompetence.

as they lack the feedback from others to construct an identity (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Fox, 2000; Kleiber, 1999). Giddens also commented on the motivation to preserve self-esteem, to 'bring off' (1984, p.55) the performance required for a particular identity, in the co-presence of peers.

Stories of exclusionary incidents were evident from a number of participants. Some suggested that they missed out on learning sport techniques and rules at school, where teachers assumed pupils already knew how to play and did not encourage those who were struggling to develop, others recalled experiencing ridicule from their peers. At a similar time to that experienced by my study participants, Hendry found that Physical Education teachers were "...reinforced towards competition and elitism, to the neglect of a possible counselling role, with pupils" (1975, p.474). Much later Bramham (2003; p.67) referred to the continued problem with victimisation and bullying of peers in school physical education. In my study there were some vivid descriptions of feeling 'left out' for those who were less competent. Peter explained

...I remember that like it was yesterday and that was 1971...y'know. (*Laughs*) and I can remember trying to throw the discus several times and the teacher just said (*changes tone of voice*) 'oh, sod off, give somebody else a turn' y'know. And I was thinking 'oh, it must be me I haven't got the co-ordination'.

(Peter)

Whilst some felt encouraged by their teachers, others did not and suggested that during games they were left to their own devices. As Rob remembered:

Well I couldn't do them. I couldn't do them properly...I couldn't play Rugby to save my life. Football somebody said 'what's a left back', I wouldn't have a clue. I wouldn't have a clue now....Goalie I knew what he did but if somebody said 'it's a goal kick' I wouldn't even know where it was going from [*laughs*]. In fact I probably know more about sport now, Rugby and football and cricket than I did when I was at school...

(Rob)

This is similar to Hendry's findings that the pupils could read teachers' preference for particular social and physical characteristics and if they did not match these their performance and motivation was affected long term (1978, p.61). However, this issue was not about disliking the activity necessarily, but about the context, the '...restrictions and learning situations they experienced" (Hendry, 1978; p.49/50).

Several participants also talked about enjoyment or dislike of sport when describing their self-definition in relation to the activity. Whilst those who considered themselves to be sports persons, enthused about the joy they gained from participating those who did not see themselves as 'sporty' often described how they might participate but did not gain enjoyment from the process. Typically phrases included: 'I've not been a lover of sport', 'not enjoying it...a general feeling that I didn't like it', 'I just hated it. I used to hate it...I hate going there, I'm not into that' and 'If I wasn't good at it I didn't like it'. Several commented on the pointlessness of the activity.

Overall, there are some important points to note. The non-sporty definition was obviously all about an identity in opposition to a sporty identity. There were three sub-groups within this. Firstly those who felt that sport was 'not for people like them', based on them perceiving that they were not the type or competent, and accepting this. Secondly those who felt they did not fit, but also presented a view of resentment towards the sports person identity, suggesting that they did not want to fit into this group. Lastly there were those who felt that sport was not relevant to them, sometimes because of its clash with other interests and sometimes because of the lack of benefit from it.

Whilst all these individuals defined themselves as non-sporty, this did not reflect the fact that all of the study participants completed some physical activity and many participated in sports, as well as physical activities which could be included in a broad definition of sport. Therefore, like with those who considered themselves to be active, the self definition as non-sporty included some who had never even considered themselves as involved in sport or as sport participants, even when they were physically active in sport. For example Heather commented: 'I didn't ever think of it as keeping fit or anything like that. It was just something to do. I didn't really think of it as sport...'

These participants still felt they did not fit into mainstream notions of the person who does sport and some of these participants had firmly viewed themselves as non-sporty since leaving school, a finding supported by Deem and Gilroy (1998). Whilst

some had more positive experiences of physical activity in adult life or outside of school as a youth, there was a notion of not 'getting beyond' an overall sense that they did not feel part of 'sport'. This is similar to Healey's findings in an exploration of the effect of memories of sport, when he says "Sport memories...will be part of the raw material from which identity is constructed and maintained (1991, p.216).

The contradiction between viewing themselves as non-sporty and yet participating in sport and physical activities is interesting. They do not associate themselves as a sports person or as active, but they participate in the activities in this category. This tension was also evident in research by Coakley and White (1992) and Lake (2001) who commented that non-identification with sport did not mean that there will be no participation in sport and physical activity altogether. The participation in sport despite non-association may be viewed as a form of resistance to mainstream notions of people involved in sport. Lake suggested that the availability and dominance of competitive team sport discourses may have such legitimacy, as opposed to alternative views of participation, that even an anti-sport identity, may offer greater social currency (1998, p.128).

There were contradictions, as comments of surprise and descriptions of pride over how they could participate in activities despite viewing themselves as non-sporty are evidence of empowerment and suggest some development of the characteristics of a sport identity. However, I noticed that the non-sporty person who participates in sport and physical activity appeared to cope with the contradiction by defining the activities as, 'not really sport'. They fitted most aspects of the non-sporty person, defining themselves as polar opposite to sports persons, as non-competitive, physically unfit and with little skills and knowledge base. It appears that doing the activity well and being the right type of person for the 'sporty type' was a critical consideration in how the study participants related to sport. I therefore assert that the actual participation may not be the relevant focus in self-definition and instead it is an appraisal of this participation within the view of the participant and peers.

5.3.5 Mixed identities in relation to sport

Some of the participants were less sure about their self definitions in relation to sport and Eichberg (2000) usefully refers to this as 'mixed up' self-identities. A number of them appeared to struggle with defining themselves as sporty or otherwise. Some told me that they were not sporty and then made comments that contradicted this throughout their interview. These participants considered themselves to be non-participants, incompatible with sports, yet their active participation in sport contradicted what they claimed about their identity. They seemed to have difficulty with admitting that they might be a sports person or in coming to terms with this. In particular, two participants provide useful examples of contradictions and ambiguities in the way they viewed themselves in relation to sport. Peter, is a late starter in sport and Jane, a lapsed participant who had been very active in her childhood and youth but had become less so over her adult years. Exerts from Peter's comments follow first:

Peter was a competitive off-shore sailor, runner and hill walker and described himself as 'active'. He has also trained and served for the Territorial Army (TA)⁴ which involved sport and physical activity participation as he says:

...the training...Although it was only weekends, it was every weekend and one evening a week and there was about 50 of us passed out all together. And it was great, y'know there was the weekends trekking up on the hills, which got us on to hill walking. Erm there was the run, you had to do three miles in 21 minutes and I remember doing 3 miles in just over 17 minutes, which was incredibly fast considering I couldn't run a few months before that. And I loved every single physical activity about it, things like section acts, there was assault courses and parachuting. I done a lot of parachuting and me Mam used to say 'all them years, you wouldn't lift a finger at school, what's changed'. 'I don't know, I just enjoy it now' and I was in a couple of years, I surprised myself so much, the amount of sporting activities I did. I mean I never did the things like boxing or anything like that, but certainly the parachuting and hill walking and we used to go away for weekends and go up to the Cheviots and Wales and that.

(Peter)

Evidently there are mixed feelings in his response, shown by Peter's surprise at his enjoyment of sporting activities. At the same time despite regular participation, throughout his adult life in sport activities, several of which were competitive, these were not reflected in his self-definition, as he still did not consider himself to be a

⁴ The Territorial Army is one of the volunteer military reserve forces in the U.K.

sports person. This is a legacy of the identity that is shaped in early childhood. He went on to describe his wife's view of his involvement in sport:

Erm my wife would probably disagree she always says 'oh, he does a lot of activities'. I think I keep active I wouldn't class myself as sporty...she plays netball religiously, she's played up at County level. And when anyone says what's your wife like, I always say, 'oh she's sporty, she plays netball'. She loves watching. I can't stand watching any kind of sport on the television. I mean, the Olympics, she was glued, I mean reverse roles really...I was just not interested in it at all. So sporty is somebody who takes part in a team sport and who watches it and talks about it far too much... I was very active, I'm not sure if I would say I was sporty.

(Peter)

Here he makes it clear that he considers himself to be 'active', rather than sporty because of his comparison to his wife's regular play of a traditional team sport. However, later in the interview he begins to consider that perhaps the activities he participates in might be sport. Whilst he would not train with an athletics club and prefers to run independently, he explained that he gained confidence and qualifications through his sailing and activities in the TA, as he explained:

Yeah, yeah I think I mean maybe a good analogy is, I've never, ever considered joining a running club. I just would not consider it... The TA gave us a hell of a lot of confidence...I mean sitting exams for, me Mam couldn't believe I'd went back to college. Y'know 'you're going back to college, I thought you hated school and everything?' And passing those exams getting me Yacht masters Certificates and gave confidence being offshore and sailing. I would call it character building...

(Peter)

At the heart of his comments there is some ambiguity. He acknowledges that he participates in sport activities, but continues to hold a view that he is not sporty. In part he attributes this to his lack of structured competitive club involvement with running and in his description of non-competitive involvement in all his activities, however he does track his running times in training and races, and he competes in off-shore sailing. In fact the contradictions are further apparent when he said:

...yachting's very much a team game. A team on a yacht and a team within a group of yachts. But to me that's what sport is a team game, that's competitive and you walk around in the doldrums if you're beat and if you win you feel great.

(Peter)

In this comment there is a sense of his excitement or disappointment that can follow a competitive race, suggesting that he gets satisfaction from competing, yet he continues to describe himself as non-competitive. Yet, Peter's involvement in competitive races and his monitoring of performance times and levels falls within the description of competitive (Coakley, 2003; Dionigi, 2004).

After a youth spent feeling that he lacked skills, knowledge and ability in sport, Peter had found physical activities that he enjoyed and was very physical in. However, his view of himself in the light of this change in participation has remained consistent. There is a sense that Peter feels that he would never 'fit' the definition of the sports person. Evidently despite Peter's involvement in sport, his definition of himself as active was an identity that he saw fitting and satisfactory, rather than as a sportsperson. Peter was very thoughtful and raised many questions about sport and participation, presenting himself as reflective. He is someone who has enjoyed sports, but finds the context and institutionalised version of sport an issue (Hendry, 1978; p.96). He questions the appeal of a sport identity associated with achievement and desire to win. His description of his childhood involvement in sport also indicated that he had problems in fitting masculine ideals centred around sport. As Curry and Weiss observe peers "...may stigmatise a male who expresses non competitive reasons for sport participation" (1989, p.267). Despite participation he does not consider his goals to be related to his view of sport, as someone who is non-competitive, and so does not view himself as a sports person. In contrast Peter's running participation in adult life is interesting, as this gives him the chance to gain personal achievement and to receive positive feedback from peers. Smith found that running provides opportunities to gain 'respect and admiration of others' in ways that might not be possible from team sports (2000, p.205). Overall, Peter deals with the tensions of sport participation and his sense of self by defining this activity as 'not real sport'.

Jane in contrast was heavily involved in athletics, netball and tennis in her early youth, she then withdrew from school based sport but continued with outdoor activities and dance through youth organisations. In adult life she has played some sports recreationally, although intermittently and has had extensive periods where she has frequently participated in health and fitness activities, particularly yoga. She describes her involvement in sport:

...erm I don't have an awful lot of time to actually take part in sport. Erm I'm not interested in football. I can't bear to watch football on the television. I'm more interested in athletics and things like that. I quite like watching tennis. My husband runs and I'm not interested in running whatsoever... Yoga, I've done quite a lot of yoga, but since I've come here [*refers to moving house and area*] I've had to give that up because I can't fit it in, with work. But I do miss that quite a bit. I was the

best at running in the school and in the Junior school. I always used to win the race. Erm, [sighs] I was the best high jumper in the year at the High school and I had the school record for that. I was good at long jumping, I was never very good at distance, but I was quite a good sprinter and I was in the netball team and was in the tennis team. Things like tennis and netball 'I' was never brilliant at, I used to make up numbers, but I was good enough to get on the team. But I was reasonably sporty, y'know I used to go and play tennis with me Dad and I used to go swimming, I was never particularly good at swimming, but I used to go swimming with friends... in the Scouts, you did a lot more adventurous things...we did canoeing, we went on an Outward Bound week, weekend or week, the pack. We went down to the river at X and were taught how to do Eskimo rolls...And we did a canoe trek about 5 miles down the X [river]...Yeah, I don't go hiking or anything like that but we go for a walk along the river. I go cycling. We do cycle along the river as a family.

(Jane)

Overall Jane, has been involved in a range of sports activities. However, even when reflecting on the time when she was more active in competitive sport, she did not really see herself as a sports person. Earlier I noted how she presents her self as enjoying, but not 'serious' about sport.

No, not really. I don't think. [*Regarding whether she would have described herself as sporty*]...I think, I probably could have been more sporty once. But I had trouble with bullying in the Junior school and when we went up to the grammar school, I got split up from the children who were bullying me... And unfortunately they were all very interested in sport, so to join the sports clubs, I had to go back to be with them, so from being about 11 or 12 I did my utmost to keep away from it. So I think I probably could have developed a lot further but because I wanted to get away from them I didn't.

(Jane)

There seems to be an emotional struggle regarding her recognition of herself as having been 'sporty' in the past. In the last quote she contradicts the earlier comment she had made, where she stated that she was reasonably sporty. There is a sense in which she is 'hedging', not completely committing to the role description (Goffman, 1952) and thereby avoiding being judged against the demands of a sports persons expected performance or realistically suggesting that she does not match up to her expectations of what 'sporty' is. This can be compared to the voice that suggests that 'sporty' people are heavily involved in sport as she has high reference points through her husband's considerable involvement as a long distance runner. Overall, she qualifies her perception of herself as somewhat sporty (despite her achievements against her school peer group in athletics). She does not seem to accept herself as clearly 'sporty'. The description of how bullying led to her being pushed out of sport, gives depth to her emotional struggle with self-definition in sport. It appears that she did think of herself as sporty once, but because of her social situation she felt that

opportunities eluded her. Yet, she ends by noting that she does participate in less strenuous activity, which she does label as 'sports':

...I still think keeping yourself active is reasonably important...I tend towards the less strenuous sports but I still think in my life they are reasonably important.

(Jane)

Overall, Jane, like Peter presents a mixed picture of her relationship with sport. However, in Jane's case her identity is blurred because her participation has lapsed. This can be understood through applying theory on identity maintenance which suggests that identity may endure for a long period of time or lapse into latency or disposition (Kleine et al. 2006). Jane had an extended time in her 20s where she was actively involved in a range of activities, however now she describes her activity as only family based, as back problems have caused her to discontinue her individual involvement in yoga and keep fit. Like many people, she has gone in and out of sport and physical activity participation (Coakley, 2003). Therefore Jane has not been an active sport participant for sometime and the comments she makes suggest she is considering that this may be a relatively permanent end to this participation. She acknowledges that it may be difficult to get involved in sport again. It appears that her present and visualised future of lack of involvement influence the way she looks at her past involvement in sport. In the same way Healey found that "The nature of the memory of sport will be associated with the respondent's present orientation towards the institution of sport" (1991, p.216). As Jane looks back across her experience of sport she is unconvinced of appropriateness of defining herself as 'sporty'. To some extent this is based on a regretful evaluation of her past participation, as she believes she had the physical ability to go further in sport during her youth, but had missed out on the opportunities and support to develop her performance. However, it is also her current lack of participation that makes her question any possibility that she could have been 'sporty' in the past. So, the decline in participation and achievement and her current disposition to sport colour her view of herself in relation to the activity.

Mixed identities and the fact that some participants described themselves in more than one way, points to the fact that self-identities can be viewed as changeable, multiple not singular and this is reflected in Giddens (1992) interpretation of fluid

identities. This will also be relevant as I go on to explore how identity may change over time. As Atchley argues “Identity is not an either/or, back/white construct. Instead it is a holistic concept that tolerates contradictions” (1989, p.186). Whilst some of the study participants had a clear view of their self-definition in relation to sport, others reflected ambiguities.

Overall, there were four identity types: sports person or ‘sporty’, active, not a sports person, and someone who participates in sport but for whom sport is a peripheral identity. In contrast previous studies have identified different types of sport and athletic identity, and identities derived from single sports such as running (Shamir, 1992), but few have drawn distinctions between types of sport and physical activity identities. The findings have similarities to classifications like Stebbins (2007) and Rowe et al’s (2004b) segmentation of the participation market. Stebbins described four types; professionals, serious hobbyists, serious amateurs, dabblers or learners (2007, p.6 & 18). As I have noted throughout the sections above the serious amateurs, learner and dabbler categories apply. Rowe et al’s (2004b) classification into mild enthusiasts, sporty types, on the sub’s bench and couch potatoes also shows similarities to the identities of my participants. Certainly those who participated in sport but did not have a sense of identification with the activity could be described as ‘mild enthusiasts’. ‘On the sub’s bench’ also encompasses those among my sample who have tried to become involved in sport, but felt excluded. However, whilst I had clearly identified those who had viewed themselves as non-participants within their self-definition, Rowe’s use of the term ‘couch potatoes’ crouches this in negative and moral language and this is not necessarily linked to the participants own understandings of identity suggesting that some relationships with sport are more worthy than others.

So far I have shown that the findings highlight a range of self-definitions in relation to sport, but how did this influence participation? Kleiber (1999) argued that the sense of identity once established will drive the choices we make. I have explored how identity may be the result of involvement in sport activity, I now turn to look at how this identity might impact on participation in the actual activity, considering identity management. Identity management is defined as the presentation of self over time (Goffman, 1971). The next section highlights the issues that surround the

identity management based on sport to get closer to understanding the impact on participation decision.

5.4 A PICTURE OF LIFELONG PARTICIPATION?

The picture presented from participants is varied but whilst only a few have continued with team sports into adult life, many of them continued with individual sports and increasingly health and fitness activities. These findings are supported by Coalter (1999, 2005) who highlighted an overall move to ‘individual, flexible, lifestyle’ activities. As well as some continuation and rekindling of activities in adult life, there was involvement in new activities, with badminton, squash, swimming, gym and yoga becoming more popular in the participants 20s and this is similar to other observations (Coalter, 1999, 2004; Hedges, 1986). At the time of interview, activities included, team games and partner games of golf, football, squash, tennis; running variously for competition and exercise; swimming, keep fit classes, gym exercises, yoga and dance; and outdoor activities of hill walking, sailing and kayaking. In the main, these are different types of activities to those they focused on in school (Coalter, 1999, 2004; Kirk, 1998; Roberts, 1997) and there was greater involvement in recreational activity. This reflects other work which suggests that competitive careers are over by 36, but that recreational participation may continue longer (Vanruesel et al, 1997). As I noted in Chapter 2 there is disagreement about the strength of participation tracking from child to adult life (Malina, 1996; Shephard & Trudeau, 2000).

A number of authors strongly support the notion that tracking will occur particularly for inactivity (Janz et al, 2000; Malina, 1996; Pate et al, 1999; Vanreusel et al, 1997). However, my findings show variability in participation. There was even evidence of some who came into competitive sport for the first time as an adult late starter or rekindled their participation in a more supportive atmosphere. Ben and Rob both provide interesting examples, in their youth both had participated in some sport, Ben more than Rob but never felt they fitted in. In adult life they had both become involved at different stages in sport and had enjoyed this. For example, Ben talks about organising a Boxing Club when he was at University because he found the other clubs disorganised as he said:

I wanted to do a few things and when I went to the swimming club or whatever it was closed and it wasn't so easy to get involved and what how and it wasn't very organised. So I thought I'd do that swimming and never actually went once at all...then in the second year we set up a boxing club and I was really involved with that for maybe six months or whatever, got myself really, really fit and then... So I did it for myself really...there was no competitive, it was just training...because there was no club I could join I made my club for me sort of thing and it built from there.

(Ben)

5.5 THE IMPACT OF LIFE STAGES ON PARTICIPATION AND RELEVANCE OF THE ACTIVITY IN LINE WITH NEEDS AT THE TIME

The findings of my research indicated that sport has various uses across life, however the importance of the activity within the participants' life varied across time. Transitions that led people to drop out of sport or reduce their involvement were evident. Generally these were all voluntary for my participants and were not forced by physical injury. Likewise previous authors have suggested that transitions (Hendry, 1993; Roberts, 1999), life span changes (Kleiber, 1999) and role transitions (Gibson, 2005) influence sport and leisure behaviour.

5.5.1 Adolescence to adulthood stage

The common sense view from previous literature was of adolescent drop out from competitive sport and a flight from sport as soon as individuals leave full time education, and this was to some extent evident in my participants' experiences (Green, 2002; Hendry, 1993; Roberts, 1996a,b; Vanurusel et al, 1997) Several suggested that moving out of sport, either in late youth or in early adult life, was a normal and natural transition. Many talked about having the choice to participate in adult life, with some expressing satisfaction that they now had control over whether they would, and the types of activities they might participate in. This equates with characterisation of leisure as '...relative freedom from the external compulsive forces of one's culture and physical environment...' (Godbey, 1985, p.9). Kate recalled thinking "Thank God I won't have to do that again, so sport after the age of 18 didn't really have a negative influence because I could take it or leave it."

This apprehension about the suitability of involvement in sport originated in late youth, where being seen as an 'adult' was important. Participants described the importance of independence and disassociating with younger people. Several could remember expecting their interest and participation in sport to diminish in adult life. Adolescence is a time of thinking about identity and restructuring of lives in terms of being adult like (Harrison Jr. et al, 2002; Kremer, 1997) raising the question 'where does sport fit in'? At this stage young people are considering whether sport allows them to be associated with adult behaviour and to face adult challenges (Hendry, 1983; Fine et al, 1990; Raymore, 1995). For example some of the participants commented on their upset when other boys did not want to play endless hours of self-organised football games, they felt pressure to 'act their age and grow up' (Roberts, 1997; p.11).

There was clear evidence that most of the interviewees had moved away from adult organised sport during their teenage years. They had exercised control over their spare time and had moved into other leisure activities which often involved hanging around with friends, experimenting with drinking and starting relationships with the opposite sex (similar transitions were found by Flintoff & Scraton 2001, Hendry et al, 1993; and Roberts, 1997). As Jackie aptly illustrated: "I think once you start work and going to pubs it starts to dwindle off a bit, you've got other things on your mind [*she laughs*]" In fact as participants had made the transition from childhood to adolescence some of them began to view sport and physical activity as less relevant to their life.

Participation turning points were also particularly evident for the women who did not define themselves as sport persons by adult life, although some had defined themselves as sporty in youth and childhood. Being sporty or being seen as sporty was viewed as largely irrelevant to them or something that they felt they did not fit even when they participated in sport activities on a regular basis. The women had been led to believe that sport was 'not for them' and more so as an adult. As they moved through adolescence they became concerned with doing what others want because of the importance of intimacy and relationship formation, and sport was often relegated (Gilligan, 1993).

However, some participants remained involved in organised sports and this became an opportunity to experiment with adult like roles (Healey, 1991), as these players were considered to be stars of their teams and made early moves to Senior play. For these individuals their play appeared to fit with their view of becoming an adult, and in their particular cases men. Senior play was about achieving a reputation in front of, and acceptance by, men (Jarvis, 2006; Stevenson, 1990). This follows on from earlier acceptance of the link between manhood and physical dominance through sport (Coakley, 2003). Keith was very thoughtful about this, and he provides an interesting example of someone for whom sport offered such opportunities of transition support, as he reflects:

I think probably one of the most significant things around that time was probably acceptance and in particular acceptance by adults. So between the ages of 16 - 18 most of this and...going to work obviously was full of grown ups and suddenly realising that...I could actually go out and give them a reasonable game and compete with them but as I was saying as much as it was the fact that they would even want to include me in something like that. This I think meant quite a lot to me really...[W]ithout getting too psychological about this, I don't know if it was the fact that my father had died when I was 11 and I hadn't had that sort of adult male influence in my life during these years and then suddenly around this time was starting to encounter adults so to speak in a different, more as friends rather than teachers or supervisors or what have you and I think that might have been quite significant. So I think, that was a vast part of that and...another thing was this sort of transition between junior sport and adult sport...I did so well that I was chosen to play for the first team which I was just amazed by...I think it was significant because I had made it into an adult team and not just an adult second team but an adult first team. So that I think I felt very good about...and then getting into the University first team which it seemed way out of reach. So I think all of that that was quite a spell where quite a lot was happening both in life and in sport.

(Keith)

Interestingly the participants who viewed organised sport as an acceptable transition into adult life had senior family members who had '...pass[ed] this love of sport onto their offspring' (Green et al, 2002, p.177) and had created a path to follow into senior sport in adult life (Roberts & Brodie, 1992). However, more of the participants tried to remain in casual sport, as it offered enjoyment away from the adult gaze.

5.5.2 The early adult life-mid 30s stage

The participants who had maintained involvement in sport into adult life, talked about the varied contribution of sport across their lives since, including stress relief from active work and study lifestyles, a challenge in contrast to unstimulating work

contexts, providing social opportunities and improving quality of life through enhancement of health and fitness (see also Brown et al, 2000; Yair, 1990) and improved social standing (Shoham et al, 2000). For example working hard, achieving and team work were important in balancing situations of unemployment or unchallenging work which were stages that several of the participants went through, as the following comments illustrate:

...it probably made study easier, knowing that sport was always round the corner.... There's an element of being challenged in sport and being up to the challenge of getting out there... once a week, and emm making the grade I think, that I'm not sure you get in the rest of your life.

(Craig)

...there was a period here for about 2 and half years where I was unemployed and I probably spent about a day or 2 a week in a gym...doing weight training, a little swimming. I did it because some people I got to know who were also unemployed did it and it was free if you were unemployed and it was something to do...it stopped when I started work... I quite enjoyed it...probably the fittest I'd ever been, ever, up to that point...some of it was company, camaraderie, some of it was just something to do and then as I started to get fitter it was actually, it helped me to set targets for myself, so I had an aim? In a fairly short time I was suddenly in a gym with lots of young men who were unemployed like me ...but my relationship to them and what I was doing, what I got out of it was a lot different. And I think that might have had quite a big impact because I think without that I might not have done other things. I think it changed my attitude; it was the first time I realised that you didn't have to win. Because before that I was bothered by not winning. Because I was kind of going to the gym with all these blokes...they were obviously very into what we were doing and they were obviously very advanced in what we were doing. And they were kind of saying to me 'well when you start you need to do this' and it was like I was accepted because I was just doing it, I was just somebody there, y'know. So just, my whole experience of that was very, very positive and it gave me so much and it also changed my attitude. I probably wouldn't have done many of the things that I did subsequently if it wasn't for that experience. So that probably had the biggest impact.

(John)

Role theory helps our understanding of the findings here, as the sport role may provide a major source of identity and community, and may compensate for what is lacking in other areas of life (Gibson, 2005). An individual who is frustrated in terms of their community membership in their ordinary life may find that membership and acceptance in a sport sub-culture provides personal identity and meaning (Gibson, 2005; Hinch & Higham, 2005). For example these comments reflect previous findings on the role of activity identities as compensation for pressure at work (Brook, 1993) and in other cases as '...creative and stimulating non-work activities...' that can help maintain '...motivation and sense of self worth' (Brook,

1993; p.161). The sport role is based on choice and discretion and can allow the individual greater control than they may have in a work situation. Further more the type of sport may provide different identity opportunities, with Craig's example of rugby exemplifying 'power and performance' sports which allow the individual to achieve in competition and John and Peter's examples of 'participation and pleasure' activities through the gym and running, showing how personal challenge and achievement can be gained.

On leaving school, many remained involved in sports activities in order to make friends and be sociable. Whether in the work context, studying or unemployed they had a sense that they should participate for social reasons, sometimes for 'courting' a partner although many enjoyed the activity as well. However, as some of the participants became more involved in the sport role they became entangled in the social network of sport and cited the value of these relationships and having 'the best of times', like Savage (1998) found in his work on undergraduate sport commitment. After all, Roberts and Brodie (1992; p.39) suggested that people become bound into a social network in which sport activity is normal. Many described using sport to meet new people when moving to new jobs, different education settings and relocating geographically. However, gradually many of the interviewees drifted out of the social sport activities from their mid-20s onwards, as they had no sense of feeling compelled to participate in sport for these social establishment reasons and other life stage tasks began to predominate. However, as they entered their 30s several described becoming increasingly aware of the need to exercise for health and fitness reasons and this was often a shared meaning with partner and friends. I explore this in the next chapter about the move into mid-life.

Whilst there were a range of transitions and life events that led to some change in participation, commonly all involve considering the emphasis placed on the activity within their lives. The participants suggested that at some transition points they had actively considered whether sport participation still offered 'meaningfulness', 'purposefulness' and belonging (Yair, 1990; p. 213). This is evidence of identity concerns. For example Keith provided a different example of a change in sport priority, when he talks about the time when he reduced his participation:

No I think it was just time, it wasn't that I felt they were incompatible, I suppose I might possibly have thought rightly or wrongly at that time was there some sense in which that playing football was something I needed to sacrifice, lay aside in order to put first the things of God. So there may have been that, I think I had that question was this something that God was asking me to give up but not because it was inheritably sinful or anything like that but just a sort of reordering of my life priorities really. So I sort of think it was in practical terms it was because of the time it took up and time which I at that point wanted to give to other things really so I think that was the main factor which is something I'm never sure whether I regret or am pleased about, probably a bit of both, part of me regrets having done that...I think what might have happened had I continued with football at that relatively crucial age but so in some respects I regret it but in other ways I think there's no point in regretting it and I felt it was the right thing at the time.

(Keith)

In this instance Keith points out that his Christian missionary work was becoming more important to him and he made a practical decision so that he could spend more time on this important area of his life. In retrospect he ruminates on the impact of this decision on his long term career in sport. Evidently this is what has been labelled a 'participation turning point' (Coakley and White, 1992). Participation turning points were evident across my interviewees, in part these were based not only on other life priorities but also on the realisation that they could not improve their performance further, or that this would require greater training commitment than they were willing to give, as they '...decided that their skills had realistically "reached their peak" (Coakley and White, 1992, p.26). Participants evidently began to think about their future, especially where they had defeats and injuries which knocked their self-confidence (Koukouris, 1994) and in cases rather than expecting to continue improving in a sport, moved to a more realistic view (Adler & Adler, 1989). This can be understood as an appraisal of identity related performance behaviour (Kleine et al, 2006).

The findings show the importance of self management to the participants, as 'reflexive mobilising of self-identity (Giddens, 1992, p.33). They actively considered what was important to themselves and others and this process was ongoing. Likewise Piliavin and Callero (1991) suggested that during a period of transition, blood donors considered 'Is it time to stop doing this?', 'Is this still me'? Across time they may become uncomfortable with aspects of sport. This may be seen as front and back regions of sport (Goffman, 1971). For example Craig had issues with behaviour in rugby off the pitch, such as rowdy and politically incorrect

behaviour and could not live with this anymore. Therefore he left the club and for a few years, replaced rugby with other sports.

As participants ask themselves whether this is still a desirable identity, there may have been change over time in their view of what constitutes life stage and age appropriate behaviour. Several described how the importance and relevance of sport declined as other areas of their life such as work, family and different aspects of leisure became more important. The dominant tasks at particular life stages shape leisure choices (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975). Likewise we can understand the behaviour evident in my findings in terms of theory on 'role transitions' (Kelly, 1983), identity stages (Kleine & Kleine, 2000) and life cycle (Levinson et al, 1978, 1996) and family life cycle (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975).⁵

Various authors refer to a set of normative expected life stages. The 'normative life transitions' (Raymore et al, 2001, p.221) have a degree of age grading and Cohen (1987, p.3) described the life course as "...like a bus journey punctuated by stages, with boarding and embarkation points". This is clearly not just a matter of transition into adulthood, as adulthood is obviously not a single stage. Whilst the accuracy of age graded transitions in today's society can be contested, the stages themselves do reflect some of the experiences of my participants. Rindfuss et al (1987) suggests that most people leave education, join the labour force, get married and have a first child. In fact several of my participants had more varied life stages, leaving education early and re-entering later; co-habiting, having children in their 30s if at all. However, my findings can still be usefully viewed through Rapoport and Rapoport's (1975) family life cycle model and Levinson et al's (1978, 1996) framework of life seasons or phases. Of particular concern to my participants were the pre-occupations of mid-establishment (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975, p.191) and mid-life transitions (Levinson et al.,1978, p190) which I explore in full in the next chapter.

⁵ See pp.221-223 in Chapter 6.

5.6 CONTINUITY OF PARTICIPATION

As I have established, a number of participants had considerable involvement in sport activities in their youth. Most of these participants continued to be involved in sports, and only one had generally disengaged from participation by the time of interview. Some researchers have found that physical activity is a relatively stable characteristic (Hirvensalo, 2000). There is support in existing literature for the notion that a sports 'career' will be less vulnerable if it is based on a broad participation base in several sports during adolescence (Roberts & Brodie, 1992; Scheerder, 2006). Green suggests that a breadth of participation will give a secure foundation to participation, 'whatever happens in other life domains' (2002, p.175). However, my study provides some contradictions to this notion, as there were a number of late starters and also those who reduced or varied in their participation across time.

Similarly there are models of identity development which explain the deepening of commitment to identity through entanglements and identity maturity (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Kleine et al, 2006; Stevenson, 1990). Certainly those who were or had been very involved in sport, maintained a consistent sense of what being a sport participant is about, however their identity with sport did not always remain active. As Giddens noted a social identity:

...carries with it a certain range (however diffusely specified) of prerogatives and obligations that an actor who is accorded that identity (or who is an "incumbent" of that position) may activate or carry out: these prerogatives and obligations constitute the role prescriptions associated with that position.

(Giddens, 1979, p.117)

In line with this the sports persons in my study expected to be involved in activity which would maintain their identity. 'Rules...rights and obligations' (Giddens, 1984, p.89) were seen in how the process of participation, challenge, hard work, physical effort and competitive nature of sport were particularly valued and determined choices made about sport participation. They continued to assess sport from the perspective of their youth and early adult view of sport. Essentially the characteristics of the sport identity, by way of reputation and standards to live up to, were set in early life (Stevenson, 1990). For Craig sport meant committed, competitive, physical and hard training and playing, and these were the aspects of

value. He found that he could not continue to play to this level so he discontinued participation. He participated occasionally but does not describe this as sport, as he says:

I suppose number 1 I don't end up in a sweat when I do what I'm doing these days...So there's not the physically pushing that I used to do, and number 2 most of what I do now is individually, I'm not in teams per se anymore. I think both of those are actually quite important.

(Craig)

Craig's view of sport, as activity of challenge, highlights a consistent view of sport where the activity had to have the characteristics of value to be sport. Therefore in Craig's case his sport identity lapsed (Kleine et al, 2006), so in this case there is break in continuity. Overall, this can be understood as identity management:

"Each of us not only 'has' but [lives] a biography reflexively organised in terms of flow of social and psychological information about possible ways of life. Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question, 'How shall I live?' has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat – and many other things- as well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self-identity" (Giddens, 1992, p.14).

In fact as Craig's case illustrates those who held sport identities were also affected by transitions in life events, although it is clear that many continued participating. It may be that they are 'locked in' to participating and the identity this gives (Roberts & Brodie, 1992). However, this 'lock in' may be at a high level of performance and training, as Craig's example shows and this may be too demanding to maintain. After all Vanruesel et al (1997) found that individual recreational participation may be less vulnerable to erosion by life transitions, than competitive involvement across time. Tracking over longer periods of time has been less conclusive (Daley, 2002). The difference in identity continuation may come about because of expectations. Someone with a salient sport identity may berate themselves when they do not train as long as they intended, whereas someone with a mild enthusiasm for sport may congratulate themselves for exercising. In this case the latter may find the identity easier to maintain (Cardinal & Cardinal, 1997).

At the same time many of those who are still highly involved in sport, used a sense of continuity to justify their involvement, for example when they commented that they have 'always done it', 'It's part of my life'. Being involved in sport when it is

considered to be important by the person ‘...serves to reinforce and validate one’s concept of self’ (Cardinal & Cardinal, 1997, p.378). The findings indicate that some who held an identification with sport, saw this as a unique aspect of their self concept, and this is important for personal continuity (Gecas & Mortimer, 1987). There is a degree of importance to maintaining continuity in identity and this acts as an incentive. Atchley (1989) notes that continuity in any role or activity can meet self-esteem and competency needs. However, Kleiber (1999, p.39) suggested that the desire for continuity in an activity may be less about maintaining a consistent identity and more about familiarity and stress relief, or maybe both. He suggests that leisure “...is an activity maintained primarily as a familiar pattern, a buffer against stress and a source of stability?” (Kleiber, 1999, p.39).

Or it may be that the importance of continuity of activity participation varies according to the extent to which the individual bases their identity on the activities, and this will entail identities associated with success. Applying continuity theory (Atchley, 1989, 2004) it can be argued that “...in making choices in life, people are attracted to past views of the self, pathways they have used in the past, coping strategies that have been successful, ways of thinking that have been supportive and helpful, and environments that have met the need for security and predictability. People are also drawn back repeatedly to activities that have proven to be the most satisfying or the least punishing” (Atchley & Barusch, 2004, p.273).

5.7 CONCERNS ABOUT BEING SEEN AS COMPETENT

All of the study participants talked about concerns about being seen as competent at activities, and this had a clear impact on the likelihood of continued participation. Some described feeling enjoyment based on achievement and receiving peer recognition because of sports mastery, whilst others gave vivid descriptions of feelings of discomfort where they ‘were not good enough’, and felt that they had failed because of poor ability, this perception had a lasting effect for some.

Keith described the benefits of others recognising his skills and abilities and the positive feedback he received. He talked first of how he had always enjoyed football

because he was comfortable with his ability and then later describes the point at which he recognised his own ability as a runner:

...it probably helped me, gave me some self confidence in that for most lads being good at sports is quite useful and fairly highly regarded and therefore being fairly good at sport I think did give me some self esteem and self confidence that I might not otherwise have had. I think it sort of helped to make friends really, especially in school and that kind of feeling if you were good at sport you get fairly well accepted by others...I can think of guys at school that became quite good friends and it was partly through sport and being involved in sport with them...and I remember we had a sort of real sporting hero at school...he was a really big guy and everyone's hero and I remember overtaking him on the home straight after this long cross country run and you know the sort of sense of achievement from that was quite powerful at the time. I really felt as though I had done something very special and I think at that point, that was somewhat out of the blue because I had never thought of myself as a runner or anything like that I had no background in it, but you know I don't know if I came 3rd or 4th or somewhere fairly high up in this race so that was a very special sort of feeling and I think that sense of individual achievement and being able to go past someone getting quite a sense of satisfaction really.

(Keith)

This example illustrates the impact of sport success, skill and fitness recognition on social status (like Bramham, 2003; Smith, 2000 among others). There was a clear link between competence and identity, with the need to gain confirmation of competence presented as a prerequisite for labelling oneself a sport participant. This had a long term effect, as perceptions of competence influenced orientation towards sport (Lake, 2001). Some participants had memories of being particularly able at sports, whilst others felt they were 'no good at it'. Concerns about competence had a lasting effect. Some felt embarrassment or shame about their ability and this had a clear effect on participation decisions, as Ben's comments illustrate "...I don't want to be crap. I don't want to go to somewhere and be crap." Decreases in perceived competence contributed to drop out (Cox, 2007; Roberts & Brodie, 1992; Sallis et al, 2000). Whilst some were particularly concerned about the effect on others playing sport with them, as they did not want to 'hold them back'. Their assessment of their own usefulness at sport has a key impact, as Jane's comments on joining an adult netball team show, "...I couldn't do it, I got too exhausted, I'd be no good to anybody..." These comments can be understood in terms of Goffman's (1971) principles of 'presentation of self'. There was a need to feel in control of the self they presented, to feel that they can put on a reasonable show and improve, demonstrating this led to empowerment, self-enhancement and esteem (Erez & Earley, 1993). After all, trust links self-identity inherently to the appraisals of others (Giddens, 1992).

These comments show that competence was important for validation from others and it was evident that this was particularly important at key life stages, such as adolescence. During this period recognition from peers and sometimes adults, for a sense of security was important (Giddens, 1992). For some their adolescent experiences of sport were typified by feeling incompetent at sports. This turned them off the activity and made them determined to keep away from the ‘nightmare activities’ and the suffering they felt. There was a clear distinction where all participants enjoyed sport and play in their early childhood, compared to a number who did not from high school onwards. Some participants talked about choosing activities that they could do and often this meant choosing one with lower skills and/or expertise requirements (Coalter, 2004). Penny mentioned that she chose to throw discus at school because ‘It was just one of the things that I suppose I thought was going to be easier if I’m being honest. I thought I can cope with that. Erm whereas throwing the javelin was harder.’ Others who did not judge themselves as able against their peers, had found activities they could develop in. However, these were not always supported by teachers or available all the way through their schooling, as Ben shows:

...there was one thing they did I think during lunch times, was this 5 star award [*in athletics*], that certificate scheme which they carried on at the High school as well, but it wasn’t done to the same...with the Junior school the sports teacher was really behind it. In the high school they weren’t interested really. It was just a lesson, if you had to do the things in lessons they wrote the time down, there was no other time devoted to it.

(Ben)

Continued concerns with competence were apparent in adult life. The participants talked about trying different activities, but for the one’s who felt less than competent this was difficult. Several mentioned that others who organised sport or who they might jointly participate with could be intolerant. As a result some avoided sport or placed themselves in situations where they would be as, or more, able than others (e.g. beginner or intermediate ability groups) or tried sports where many people would be beginners. Rachel illustrates these competence concerns:

And I think sometimes sporty people can be quite intolerant if you’re not very good I think especially if its a competitive sport so I think sometimes people talk about participation but unless its geared particularly for beginners, maybe that’s why I

enjoyed the golf and the riding because it was particularly geared for beginners...if you're not very good at [*sport*] people are quite dismissive of you because people who can catch the ball and run and things don't always take kindly to people who can't, you know if you're playing rounders or something they get very frustrated if you don't do things well.

(Rachel)

Some participants had experienced a lack of acceptance and in extreme cases, bullying at a particularly sensitive time, during adolescence. Goffman suggested that all young people had to pass through 'trial by taunting...until he develops a capacity to maintain composure' (1972, p.104). For some this had a lasting effect as the sense of 'not fitting' in sport, remained consistent during their adult life. However, with only one exception the participants had all found some physical activities in adult life where they felt they 'fitted in'. These other activities were a much wider range than the traditional definition of sport, including outdoor activities, dance, yoga and other fitness activities. Others participated in sport activities (e.g. competitive football, running and sailing). For some of these rekindlers and late starters after years of failure, this led to a boost in self-esteem and confidence (Healey, 1991). There was some sense of positive self-discovery and surprise among them and an emotional tone to the way they talked about this. This is similar to Healey's (1991) findings where late starters who had suffered years of humiliation and then found ability, spoke of metamorphosis or rebirth. As one late starter said "it gave me a completely different outlook on myself and my abilities – I felt *new*" (Healey, 1991; p.219).

The findings highlight the importance of control of participation, choosing to participate where they could display or develop competence. This competence in turn can secure an identity. Overall, competence in youth appeared to have a lasting effect on later sport participation, as many of the participants looked back on past experiences to suggest whether they will be competent. However, negative experiences of sport in childhood and youth did not necessarily mean that the individual would be a non-participant in adult life, again challenging Roberts and Brodie's notion of a 'secure foundation' (1992). Whilst these participants seemed to maintain their self-definition as a non-sports person, they did demonstrate participation in physical activity, including sport in adult life. I noted in an earlier section that these participants always qualified their self-definition in relation to sport suggesting that although they participated they did not fit a definition of the sports

person. This does however demonstrate that negative experiences did not always lead to a lifetime without sport activity.

5.8 CONCLUSION

Concerns about presenting an appropriate and competent self, influenced sport participation. Overall, I have shown that the self identity linked to sport and its appeal to the individual varies across the life course. Therefore the findings of my research indicate that, among other things, identity has a major influence on the decision making process regarding sport participation (like Coakley and White, 1992). In this chapter I discussed how the participants explained changes in the relevance of sport to their self-identity. Many of the participants drew links between their self-definition as sports persons or otherwise, and the ideas they held about sports persons and in this way identified whether an identity derived from sport was attractive and appropriate. Participating in sport was clearly influenced by a consideration of whether sport was important to them and consistent with their sense of who they were or what they would like to become (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2007). It is clear that whether the prominence of sport in their life was deemed to be satisfactory and offered the chance to demonstrate competence, influenced their continued participation (Atchley, 1989). In particular a pattern emerged where changes in the view of identity were associated with life stage transitions (Levinson et al, 1978, 1996) and conflicts between roles (Turner, 1956, Zurcher, 1979), typically in the case of my participants between childhood and adolescence, adolescence and early adulthood, and into mid-life (Hareven, 1995).

It is apparent that changes in participation reflect changes and tensions between the meaning of sport as an activity, and the meaning and value of participation in the individual's life. By this I mean that the reasons for participation in the activity, the actual activity, and type of participation, will affect whether an individual will personally enjoy an activity and whether they deem their participation to be socially acceptable. For example some participants valued sport as an activity, but qualified the value of participation in the activity. Rachel's comment on sport: "I suppose I think in principle it's a good thing" illustrates the distinction between a construction of sport as 'good' and the potential for a conception of engagement and association

with sport as different. This chapter raises a number of tensions between sport participation and midlife and the different perspectives on participation in sport, activity and exercise. Therefore in the next chapter I go onto explore how this sport identity was negotiated as the participants moved into midlife.

CHAPTER 6

MIDLIFE AND CONFLICTUAL FEELINGS ABOUT SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The overall theme discussed in this chapter is mid-life negotiations in sport and physical activity participation. It focuses on the sub-themes of the pull to, and push from participating in this activity. Whilst some of the participants who had been involved in sport throughout their lives continued, there were others who were now focusing on health and fitness exercise or whose participation had declined. In this chapter I focus on the reasons the interviewees gave for feeling they should continue to participate or increase their participation at this life stage, and I also consider the constraints on participation. When I originally started this study I had intended to consider the effects of constraints and enablers. Whilst there were examples of structural constraints on the practicalities of participation by the interviewees, the most often cited pressures to maintain participation centred on social expectations, regarding the social value of sport and exercise, the individuals' responsibility for health and at the same time appropriate behaviour in the context of age and social roles. It is these issues which impact on participation that I consider in this chapter.

This chapter is split into three sections. Initially in the chapter I consider pressures to participate in sport and physical activity, focusing on health, ageing and the expectations of significant others. Secondly I consider constraints on participation by considering different perceptions of ageing effects, family and work role conflict, sense that sport is for others, and the impact of social support. In the third section I consider my participants' conflicting feelings about sport and physical activity participation in midlife and the impact on their current participation. I use Gilligan's (1993, p.63) ethic of care theory as a key perspective for understanding the issues surrounding participation in this family and work orientated life stage. A potential conflict arises from additional moral pressures of self management of health, and I consider the theory of 'healthism' to explore this (Crawford, 1980). I use a range of theories, particularly Kelly (1983), Levinson et al. (1978, 1996), Rapoport and

Rapoport (1975) and Partington et al (2005) to consider the social construction of mid-life in sport and physical activity.

6.2 CONSTRAINTS INTO PARTICIPATION

There were a few study participants (Keith, Andy, Phil) who suggested that the main reasons for continuing to participate in sport were enjoyment and a continued sense of identity in relation to sport. However, for the majority their reasons for participating had changed and a sense of expectation or compulsion to participate was evident as they moved into midlife. All the interviewees remarked that, around their early 30s¹, feelings surfaced about how they ‘should’ exercise, as the following quotes illustrate.

Erm, I take part in sport, not as much as I *should* but erm...I do enjoy and I feel as if I should regularly exercise. I think that the fact that I do regularly exercise is good for me. I know I should do more, but I enjoy what I do.

(John)

I think as you get older, I think yer, I don't know I think you're a bit more aware of *what you should be doing and what you shouldn't be doing*.

(Clare)

Yes I'm not interested in keeping fit I just think *I should do it...I always feel guilty* as its something *I should be doing* rather than something I enjoy...Somebody at work tried to start a ladies netball club at work and they said are you interested and I said oh no I'm not interested in that at all and then I thought *maybe I should do it* but then I think well I'm absolutely no good at it and so unfit...I think keeping fit, I feel *I should be doing it* so *I feel guilty* when I'm not doing it but apart from that?

(Rachel)

The moral language of words and phrases such as ‘should’, ‘shouldn’t’ ‘intend’, and ‘I feel guilty’ illustrate the sense of obligation to participate in some type of physical activity. Underlying this compulsion was often a sense of guilt about lower levels or non-participation. This guilt was based on feelings about not complying with various social norms of health related behaviour, but also not meeting others expectations or standards which I explore in the next few sections.

¹ It is interesting to note that around this time (early 1990s) there was a rise in prescriptive health promotion and moralising on healthy behaviour (Fitzpatrick, 2001).

The sense of compulsion to participate varied. Firstly the interviewees felt guilt to different degrees and this seemed to depend on the reference points they used to compare their current participation against. Where participants' significant others were very involved in sport, there were stronger senses of what suitable activity levels were. For example Clare talked of her husband demonstrating exercise routines to her. And secondly, there was evidence of tension between past participation purely based on enjoyment and the sense that they should now participate for fitness. Jackie illustrates this tension when comparing the meaning of sport participation between the past and now as:

...a way of keeping fit really more but at school more sort of (*pause*) well I don't know a way of keeping fit really it was more enjoy...well no I enjoy it now but to keep fit.

(Jackie)

However, at the same time the individuals talked about having a choice about activity and only participating in the activities they enjoyed. As Rob and Penny explain:

I've chosen to do things...If somebody says to me 'you've got to do that' I'd say...oh no. No, it was always my choice.

(Rob)

No I think...the main difference is that I want to do it, whereas with school P.E. they were you had to do... I've tended to enjoy the things that I didn't have to do at school. I didn't enjoy the cold weather sports at all really. I haven't really participated in sports, apart from the walking which I do enjoy...

(Penny)

This illustrates the complexity of participation choices, with participants feeling they have a choice about participation, compared to the compulsory nature of activity at youth level, and yet increasingly feeling compelled to exercise. I now move onto consider these feelings of compulsion to participate.

I should participate...

6.2.1 ...for my health

The participants viewed sport and physical related activity as important health behaviour, and there was a reasonable level of health consciousness and knowledge. When commenting about their current participation, health reasons dominate. For

example when thinking about why they want to participate more, any notion of participating for the sake of the activity was minimal, with a much greater emphasis on fitness and health. Rob said about his reasons for participation “Fitness. I don’t know, because I wanted to. Because I want to be fit and healthy.” Rob’s comment shows some sense of considering the choice to participate, against the pull to participate, so there was some awareness of the impact of health expectations. Those who participated mentioned various health related benefits; fitness and health, body weight and shape -management, and providing a counter-balance to work through stress management, and there was some sense that these were socially approved benefits. The sense as an individual that they should participate for these reasons, reflects dominant health discourses, such as ‘healthism’ (Crawford, 1980). This is the term coined for the link between health, and a slim body shape acquired through exercise, and this is considered to be underpinned by individualism (Crawford, 1980; Kirk & Colquhoun, 1989; Rail & Beausoleil, 2003; Wright et al, 2006).

Some of the participants suggested that they simply wanted to be fit and healthy. For example Kate talks of the physical benefits and Phil of the energy derived from training.

I always enjoy the feeling that you get once you've done something, once you've worked hard and you've had a good session, either a weights session or a training session... I enjoyed the buzz that you get after it...

(Phil)

I should really do it every day, morning and night but I don't usually but sometimes if I can't sleep at night I will get up and do some yoga. I really feel the physical benefit of it. I really think it is something that is good for your body.

(Kate)

However, more often the participants talked about health and fitness outcomes in terms of other benefits, be it for daily physical function, support for sport performance or weight management. The most commonly mentioned of these was weight management. The following quotes illustrate the widely held view that they needed to use exercise to manage their weight or body.

Get fit, lose weight, that's the prime thing that motivates me if it...

(Rachel)

...also I've started to put on a little bit of weight, so I think you try hard to go...
(Heather)

I started putting on a lot of weight again and last year, just before the X Run last year I was 15 stone, six and I couldn't believe it...and I realised that I had put a lot of weight on.
(Peter)

Keep fit is something I do when my weight goes up really.
(Penny)

This shows that the participants had concerns over whether their weight and shape were acceptable, particularly the females. Concern with body image, perceived defective body parts, toning and shaping, illustrate the participants sense of a particular version of health (Wright et al, 2002) and have been well established in previous studies (Leith and Shaw, 1997; Markula, 1995; Wright et al, 2002;) and in a few focused on the middle aged (Currie, 2004; Deem & Gilroy, 1999; Scott-Porter, 2002, Thomsson, 1999). A number of my participants noted that they felt 'better' for trying to lose weight or 'shape up' and Currie found that the women in her study felt 'better and less stressed' after 'doing something about my body', through exercise (2004, p.233). Whilst my participants talked about messages to exercise for health from education and health promotion, they did not comment on this when talking about losing weight and it was clear that this was a personal desire to meet normative expectations and appearance ideals, which they had internalised.

Fewer participants talked about the use of sport and exercise for functional benefits. Some spoke of using exercise to support their sport ability, however only one participant talked about exercising in order to improve the functionality of their body in daily life. Ben explained what he wanted to get from sport and physical activity:

...perhaps health, no, well to be fit. I don't know perhaps health does come into... I would like to be, whenever I need to run for a bus, to be able to do it with ease...or if I need to lift a heavy weight to be able to do it with ease and I haven't got the frame, a sporty frame.
(Ben)

He then went onto say that there is a cultural pressure to 'look good':

Maybe a limit of the culture...you know there's not that much pressure to do it. There is a bit of pressure to be fit or whatever but it's only, the fitness is more you look good, you're not necessary to be fit...So that's a pressure, an external pressure...

(Ben)

His comments show an awareness of a contradiction between his personal desires and social expectations as he understands them. He wants to have a capable body, but is aware of cultural scripts suggesting that he should look healthy. Rob's focus on functional strength benefits shows a resistance to the cultural discourse, but he suggests that the likelihood of achieving his personal goals is made difficult because of lack of social impetus. The difference in cultural discourse was also illustrated by Wright et al. who found that young men talked about fitness as "...a desirable state in and of itself" (2002, p.5). This points to the links drawn between health and body shape and size in the discourse of 'healthism' (Crawford, 1980, 2006; Fullagar, 2003). Whilst most of the women and some of the men in my study had bought into the discourse on body shaping, similarly Emma resisted the pressure to use exercise for body shaping and was concerned with fitness in itself.

...I was getting conscious...after having the children I felt like I really needed to do something because I needed to not so much to get back in shape because I've never been one to think 'oh I've got to be size 12' or anything like that, I just felt...I can't think what the word is I'm looking for. I felt that I wasn't fit. I felt that I could be doing more to be fit.

(Emma)

These cases are different as other respondents talked about being fit for sport or fitness for shaping their body, so fitness for function and as an end in itself was less evident, and yet was enabling in the sense of daily life.

The use of sport and physical activity for stress relief was also mentioned but mainly by male participants. Several related this to providing a balance to difficult work situations, as Andy and Phil's comments illustrate.

...it's partly sort of health bit. I mean I do it because it's good for me, but that's an aspect of it. I find it a great stress relief at the moment because you're not thinking about anything else at that time you're focused on that.

(Andy)

... it gives me a balanced view on things I find that it is a great stress reliever...I think that if you bottle stress up it is not good for you. I enjoy going out for a run, I find that it relaxes me to get rid of the stress and I think it makes me a well balanced person in the sense I find that I am fairly laid back. I have got quite a fiery temper, but that is controlled somewhat by that release and I find that I get on well with people...

(Phil)

Likewise other research has noted that the impact of high demand jobs can be reduced through positive use of leisure (Cassidy, 1996; Trenberth & Dewe, 2002). Cassidy notes that sport can "...provide challenge, opportunities for control, variety, skill use, clarity, and opportunities for social interaction..." (2005, p.54) to support well-being through providing stress relief. Others have argued that health and fitness, and exercise can give stress relief by providing continuity in an unstable life (MacNevin, 2003).

Overall, the impetus to participate for health related reasons was linked to their knowledge that they should exercise, look after their body, and manage their weight and shape. There were various comments on what 'they say you should do' which could be interpreted as experts' views on the incorporation of exercise in a healthy lifestyle and there was clearly a sense of obligation to exercise to have good health, as typical comments illustrate:

Yes when I'm not doing it. I think it's something people should be doing
and all the health education tells us we should do exercise but.

(Rachel)

You know people say you know, you really should go three times a week, but I just
put other things first.

(Heather)

...and I know it's probably good for you. They tell you it's good for your heart...

(Jane)

...from an education point of view it was well drummed into us that sport was
important for our health...

(Penny)

The participants generally linked health to body image, fitness and avoiding body decline, rather than emotional and physical wellbeing. Bordo's (1989, 1993) arguments of a tyranny of slenderness or slimness and Giddens (1992, p.7) link between 'bodily development and lifestyle' matched the participants need to watch shape and weight. This understanding of the need to exercise for body control reiterates Fullagar's argument that health policies '...ignore the embodied pleasures, meaningful social relationships and joyful potential of movement that women have identified in relation to leisure...' (2003, p.47). Most spoke only of the need to exercise for good health, shape and weight, only a few spoke of the importance of

exercise alongside other required behaviours in a wider sense of good health. This can be seen in the following comment from Kate on the role of exercise in the:

...overall care for the body, like eating and drinking the right things and I suppose my husband is an influence there because we don't smoke and we eat the recommended fruit and veg everyday and we grow our own vegetables and it is just part of that whole package of being fit and healthy and it becomes more important as you get older and get into your forties and realise that you are starting to get old.

(Kate)

6.2.2 ...for my changing 'health' needs with ageing

The participants appeared to have increased their health consciousness in the last 10 years and often they made a link to starting a family or moving into more sedentary or stressful work. Several now felt a need to 'work at' being healthy and keeping fit, whereas before they felt fit because of their youth or a more active lifestyle day to day. It was clear that participants felt that exercise has greater value as they grow older. They felt a need to increase their exercise participation and at the time of interview many had started to think about their exercise behaviour. This health related message was backed up by personal health experiences and observations of peer health problems. There were comments on physical limitations, whilst some had become more concerned about health issues as they had been shocked by illness of significant others, as the following set of comments illustrate:

...I've noticed my knees have started to click quite a lot so I think I should do some exercise otherwise I'm going absolutely crippled by the time I'm 40...And weights always an issue but more fitness now as I keep thinking I'm going to pay the price as I get older because of a complete lack of sport which is not something I've thought about before.

(Rachel)

I've noticed now probably in the last, almost the last ten years that I can't walk as far or whatever...I don't think it's illness or whatever, not just because I'm unfit, but my legs ache, knee joints, my shins or whatever, perhaps whether or not they're not strong enough or just physically can't take it anymore.

(Ben)

He [*his Father-in-law*] was in his late fifties and he'd always been overweight, a stressful sort of chap and there was heart disease running through the men in his family and he had a heart attack...and required surgery...even though there is no family history in my family, it started to get me thinking about you know health and when you're sort of getting into your 30s I suppose you start to think to later years and think well I don't want to be sort of taking it easy. And now approaching middle age, there's no reason why you should, I want to stay active. I always felt better when I was active...

(Phil)

...I'm in my early forties now and I feel that if I don't...I think I was just naturally fit when I was in my twenties and probably early thirties whereas I think now that I have to make more effort.

(Kate)

The increasing relevance of discourses around exercise and health were clearly linked to ageing, with greater awareness of physical materiality and mortality (Dionigi, 2002; Grant, 2001). This illustrates a heightened sensitivity to others misfortunes, because they are coming to terms with their own mortality in the mid-life transition (Levinson et al. 1978). Levinson et al. found that the midlife transition (40-45) encompassed realisation of biological decline and tension between the polarities of young and old.

Several of the participants suggested that they felt a need to maintain their fitness or work against declining fitness, as the following comments demonstrate:

...I think I'm getting unfitter all the time and I tried to do something about it.

(Ben)

Probably after I had the children I felt as though I needed to keep fit. And probably getting older you feel as though you're not as fit as you were...I never really tried to keep fit before, now I feel as if I should. I feel as if it's important now, whereas I never used to.

(Heather)

The participants suggested that perceived importance of taking overall care of health increases with age. This was expressed in terms of the need to take care of their body to ensure future function and vitality. Phil suggested that there was a greater health related need for exercise when he said:

It probably is more important now...as you get a little bit older you are conscious of the need to look after yourself. I think that the running does help me there.

(Phil)

Kate expands on this when she referred to looking after her body and maintaining its function as one ages:

...it's just an important part of life and I think you've just got one body and if you want it to last until you are seventy or eighty you really have to look after that ...and

it becomes more important as you get older and get into your forties and realise that you are starting to get old.

(Kate)

Kate and Phil's comments show the importance of prolonging the body and staying active as they grow older. They feel the need to act now against ageing, to keep youthful and active (Oberg & Tornstam, 2001). These comments and the findings above can be interpreted by looking at the findings of Featherstone et al (1991) about anticipated decline of body function. The participants recognised some decline in their body and were reacting to this. This decline had been gradual, but they were now starting to notice physical changes which they put down to ageing. Some felt the need to keep their exercise up, others to do more, whilst some felt they might be too old and I consider this later in the chapter. This concern with preservation of self, shows a desire to manage impressions (Goffman, 1971), and the need to discipline the body (Giddens, 1992) to try and protect self from further ageing effects.

Society '...values youth, fitness and health' (Dionigi, 2002, p.6) and Hepworth and Featherstone (1982) suggest that it has become the norm to engage in some fitness activities and not give into ageing inactively. As the participants' comments have shown some were concerned with losing control over appearance (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006). My findings complement other research which shows that women develop clear concerns about the ageing effect on their bodies, and that these feelings are experienced as early as their late 20s (Deem & Gilroy, 1998). 'Getting fatter' was a key concern (Deem & Gilroy, 1998, p.94) and seemed to be based on negative images of older people, letting themselves go.

As an extension of the above, some felt pride in being highly physically able for their age, they were pleased that they were still involved in sport and physical activity and Andy, Phil, Peter and John were particularly proud of their level of performance. In this way being involved in sport appears to be an adaptive strategy to ageing, and central to maintaining identity (Dionigi, 2002). Dionigi found that much older adults felt pride to still 'be able to do it' and my participants even just approaching midlife had expected to be doing less, so expressed surprise and satisfaction about how they had maintained or increased their participation. They often differentiated themselves from others of the same age, as Phil said about his physical ability and fitness:

...if most men of my age were to get up and play a sport, they would be knackered a lot sooner than I would, I wouldn't be out of breath or anything like that. You know I could sustain a game, I think that the fitness is there, which a lot of men of my age if they have been fairly inactive, wouldn't have...

(Phil)

Phil is typical of the respondents who suggested that they were exceptions to the rule, and that they could remain active and could even improve their fitness (Dionigi, 2002). This can be interpreted as positive ageing (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1995), with a comparison of the body "...to idealised standards of physical ageing...youth, fitness and beauty..." (Hepworth & Featherstone, 1982, p.94). Phoenix & Sparkes (2007) found that younger people are warned about future body decline and the virtues of body work to maintain a youthful appearance are extolled. At the same time older people who look good and are fit and active are praised (Dionigi, 2004; Featherstone & Hepworth, 1995). My participants, approaching midlife, appear to carry forward the message of body maintenance and desire to be active in old age, as a positive construction of midlife.

6.2.3...because of moral expectations linked to Sport and Physical activity

The feelings of compulsion were also linked to taking individual responsibility for health and having the discipline to exercise. The moral imperative demonstrated was that the females (and some of the men) wished to exercise to control their body shape and weight, and the men more so to be fit, and this is supported by the findings of Wright et al (2003) and observations of Edgley and Brisset (1990). Jane referred to the need to 'work hard' to get fit and how she was unsure "...whether I've got the discipline to do that." There was a sense that they were in pursuit of a 'moral good' (Burrows & Wright, 2004, p.193). They talked of this as a personal responsibility, which reflects an acceptance of the discourse of a moral duty to monitor and manage health (Wright et al, 2006). Participants described their behaviour in moral terms when they fell short of perceived social expectations to exercise. For example Rachel describes herself in terms of being 'bad' and Emma as a 'slob' initially, then changing this to a lesser criticism of 'lazy':

...I think it was about getting fit and losing weight...which I think was the trend all the way through. Although *I wasn't bad* at that time I think it was just about getting fit.

(Rachel)

That was really to try and get fitter... I had lapsed but...I didn't see it as a problem then. I just felt I wasn't fit. I mean I'm not no great sports thing, or even now. But I just felt like I felt I wanted to do something to get more active. I felt a bit of a, not *slob* that's the wrong word, *lazy* if you like...

(Emma)

Several of the participants referred to their lack of, or lower participation as morally lacking. This is supported by Fullagar who noted that there are moral sanctions against those who fail to participate in fitness related activities and those who “experience lifestyle-related illnesses and obesity” have only themselves to blame (2003, p.55). Whilst Emma draws back from calling herself a ‘slob’ previous work suggested that those who fail to complete some physical activity are castigated as ‘self-indulgent slob’ (Featherstone et al, 1991, p.183). The concerns with moral laxity was evident in the way they talked about the struggle to be ‘disciplined’ and not be ‘lazy’. In this sense health has been linked with virtue and responsible behaviour, and in turn exercise with health (MacNevin, 2003), and on the flipside failing to complete this and becoming unfit was defined as evidence of moral irresponsibility (Wright et al, 2002). Previous commentaries identify the push for individuals to take responsibility for their own health, to reduce the risk of disease and their burden on the state, and notes that there is a culture of ‘blaming the victim’ for ill health (Bercovitz, 2000; Henderson et al, 2001; Rail & Beausoleil, 2003). Messages from Health Education have instigated “...the category ‘self-inflicted illness’, which results from body abuse (overeating, drinking, smoking, lack of exercise etc.)...” (Featherstone et al, 1991, p.183). This is reflective of the historic base of sport in the muscular Christianity movement of the late 1800s, with its focus on disciplined behaviour and moral virtue (Horne et al, 2001).

6.2.4...because being ‘healthy’ is a valued identity

There was a sense that complying with expectations and taking responsibility for their health was viewed positively. It was clear that being ‘healthy’ and ‘active’ were important and acceptable within their sense of ‘who they are’. With the addition of family, and ageing, participants suggested that being ‘healthy’ was now more important. A view of a healthy person was evident from participants comments and this reflected activity involvement and personal characteristics.

Whilst some associated being healthy with generally being active, many viewed sport participation as part of a package of attributes of 'being healthy'. Whilst most used exercise in health and fitness and individual activities to gain health benefits at this stage, they still made a connection between sport activity and health when referring to being 'healthy'. They appeared to suggest that if they did not engage in sport or deliberate and planned physical exercise, being active in their working and domestic life could compensate but this other physical activity and exercise was seen as second best. They suggested that 'healthy' people are disciplined about physical activity and 'work hard' at it.

This sense of the disciplined person being involved in planned physical exercise can be usefully interpreted by looking at features of modern identity. As Crawford explains:

In a health-valuing culture, people come to define themselves in part by how well they succeed or fail in adopting healthy practices and by the qualities of character or personality believed to support healthy behaviours. They assess others by the same criteria. Accordingly, both the conventionally understood means of achieving health and the social state of being designated as 'healthy' are qualities that define the self.
(Crawford, 2006, p.402).

This could be viewed as a narcissistic obsession which links social identity and shame or as a late modern concern with the body, as part of the reflexive project of the self (Giddens, 1992, p.8/9). However, whilst exercise was viewed as a requirement to being 'healthy', there were contradictory views around the link to sport participation. Whilst most drew a stronger link between health and fitness related activities, some noted that they had always linked sport participation to being healthy and portrayed sport to be a health enhancing activity to their children. Some participated in little sport themselves nowadays, and in fact some of them described feelings of discomfort and hypocrisy about their encouragement of their children's activity. For example Clare was particularly concerned that she viewed sport as an important part of being healthy, and as she only participated a little, she questioned whether she could see herself as healthy. This could be interpreted as confusion over the legitimacy of types of physical activity as health enhancing and concerns over the importance of being healthy. Therefore whilst "...health is a contested concept which may be interpreted in a variety of ways" (Lake, 1998, p.38), I would contend that the

relative value of activities in enhancing health is also contested. The participants links between being healthy and participation in various activity types also reflects the overall social acceptability of the activity. None the less, the overall importance of being 'healthy' encouraged physical activity.

6.2.5...because of expectations and encouragement from significant others linked to participation

Whilst the participants desire to participate for health had a personal and social impetus, in part this was based on an interpretation of significant others expectations. All of the interviewees with partners were influenced by the significant others' views on their current sport participation. For those who had lower or varied levels of participation throughout their life, their partners' expectations and encouragement became part of a sense that they 'should' or 'should not' participate, as the following comments typify:

I think it probably did influence me, been as my husband he's always been sporty... he did influence me to do, definitely the badminton, I would never have done that. I think that was when I started going to the gym more...See our [*family*], everybody's more sporty than me. I'm the odd one out...I think it's just for myself, I feel as though I have to keep fit now and I never thought about it when I was younger.

(Heather)

Me husband, he often says you should do this, you should do that, why don't you join the gym...he often says you know we should join the gym...or you know just even sometimes in the house...just doing a few like stretching exercises, because obviously with him and his karate, he sort of knows all the sort of exercises to do, you know just to firm up, yer stomach and things. So I get erm I mean encouragement off him...

(Clare)

Similar to Clare's case, all the women mentioned the support of their partner in encouraging them to participate or identifying opportunities for joint participation. There were examples of the interviewees participating with their partner and as a family, with their children. However, whilst Clare's husband explains how to do body shaping exercises, the other participants talked of encouragement to exercise from their partners and not the reasons why. Some of the participants felt a need to satisfy others, such as meeting their partner's ideals regarding exercise or being fit enough to be active with their children. For example, Kate explained how she participated less than her partner: 'Yes I would be different from him, but he is a

good influence on me', but she went onto explain how he introduced and supported her development in many different outdoor activities.

The women also currently found friends of the same sex a key social support for jointly participating and identifying opportunities (Lenskyj, 1988). In contrast several of the men mentioned significant support from male friends in their earlier adult years, but these men went on to participate within a variety of social situations. The women suggested that friends had similar attitudes to them, related to sport, in contrast to their partner. Some of the women found that participating with their partner or the type of activities they would encourage them to participate in, unappealing. In some cases sport participation was an area where the women felt they could not understand their partners' involvement and they seemed to have more common ground with friends on sport and exercise participation.

6.3 WHAT EXERCISE DID THEY FEEL COMPELLED TO DO?

Most talked about the need to participate in health and fitness and individual activities (such as gym work out's and swimming), rather than sport when they referred to health related behaviour. A number thought about exercise as relevant health related behaviour, rather than sport and all participants were currently more likely to use exercise in health and fitness activities to gain health benefits. This matches the traditional exercise model used in health and physical activity promotion work, focused on 'vigorous exercise and cardiovascular outcomes' (Bercovitz, 2000). Some were concerned over the level of exertion of the activities they took part in, wondering whether they would confer health benefit. Commonly this had become a concern where family physical activity, had replaced the independent and the physical effort was compromised by the level of ability of others they participate with. As Heather said about family walking:

I think if you seriously hill walk, it's good. It's very good for your legs isn't it?...It isn't strenuous enough, a lot of the hill walking we do. I mean I know it's got to be quite good for people, but I don't see it as sport.

(Heather)

As the findings show so far, most of the participants felt pressure to participate or enjoyed sport and physical activity participation. Some aspects of this were positive

and centred on the empowerment of positive ageing and functional health. However, other aspects centred on pressure to participate for body and health management. Overall, there was a sense that some physical activity was morally endorsed and I explore this in the third section of this chapter on types of current participation. However, whilst the participants were encouraged to participate, they also felt constraints on, or pressure to reduce, their participation and I now turn to this.

6.4. CONSTRAINTS ON PARTICIPATION

There was an overall sense that sport did not fit with being an established adult, this was partly linked to age appropriate behaviour and also an implication of role appropriateness and prioritisation as they ended their 30s and moved into their 40s. I consider the age appropriate issues first of all.

6.4.1 I'm too old for this

There was evidence of perceptions of age appropriate behaviour, in the description of social expectations, where sport was described by some as an activity they were 'too old' for, and one that people disengaged from by this age. Craig's comment illustrates his acceptance of the social norm of exit from sport by his age.

I haven't come across that many people up here who are actually involved in sport, that may be because of my age and the age group other people have given up by now. So that's another reason why I haven't got that heavily involved at times.
(Craig)

Active participants also showed their awareness of this social expectation, which centred on concerns among participants regarding the amount they were associated with sport by others. There was a sense that being very committed to participation would be seen negatively, and some expressed embarrassment with references to 'immaturity', being 'obsessive' and labelled as a 'jock'. Ben commented:

...when you get to a certain age it becomes embarrassing...to go around kicking a ball on the field... even if there's other lads there...maybe you can do it occasionally but if you're there all the time people think its a bit odd. And also if you hang about young children you'll get a reputation....
(Ben)

Here Ben show his concerns about being at odds with social norms and expresses concern that someone participating with children in a casual sport activity may be labelled as deviant. There was clearly some consideration of whether the activity and the sense of self from this were appropriate at this age. Whilst there was no evidence of any mid-life crisis there was some sense of reassessing self in relation to participating in sport and activity, but this was alongside a consideration of the importance and prioritisation of roles in this life stage, characteristic of midlife transition, which I consider in the next section.

As a life transition stage, mid life has been described as a possible 'crisis' point, this is where people evaluate their sense of self and face issues of 'bodily decay' and mortality (Blaikie, 1999, p.205). Other authors suggest that crisis at midlife cannot be assumed (McPherson, 1984). However, Kleiber (1999) and Levinson et al. (1978) suggest that during the mid-life period many look back and reflect on achievements so far and try out new choices. As Kleiber said:

Midlife brings a sense of unease for many people. The loss of youthful appearance and accompanying feelings of diminished physical attractiveness, career disillusionment, relationship problems, bodily changes, changes in sexual activity, ageing and dying parents...

(Kleiber, 1999, p.139-140)

In fact several of the participants also suggested that they may now be too old for sport and physical activity, because of their declining body. Whilst they expressed this view, it was clear that they had only just begun to think this way. In the case of Jane, she started to think that she might be physically restricted from participating, because she could not participate for some time after injuring her hip during childbirth, her general doctor also discouraged her from exercising.

...me son and I, I've made him walk to school and I've walked back this morning, cause I get to the stage where I feel the necessity to have some exercise...I really should do something about sorting my hip out. I mean it's fine now because I don't do any exercise, but I think I should because, as you get older you can get too old to do something. ..I know that a lady that teaches my daughter netball they have a club at X high school and she said y'know, 'come along'. And I'd just be so embarrassed, because I'd spend the whole time, puffing and panting [*she laughs*]. I just don't know whether I could do it now. I think as you get older you think to yourself, well maybe I shouldn't take these sports up, I'm too old now I could end up in a little box somewhere in the ground...I don't know if I get myself too, I don't like the feeling of my heart y'know pounding in my chest [*she visually demonstrates- by banging hand*]

against her chest].... I tend to go for less strenuous exercises, than sort of like the things that we used to do at school...I just don't like the feeling of getting so exhausted and I know it's probably good for you... I find that things like yoga, I can do a lot with my body and I can do, I can become supple and I can have the exercise, but I don't get that feeling of the exhaustion afterwards, although I suppose that's the aching afterwards.

(Jane)

She is starting to feel the restrictions of being unfit, but associates this with age, commenting that she may take it too far and end up exhausted or may cause herself damage or death. Likewise studies of older age groups have found concerns among some that exercise could be detrimental to their health (O'Brien Cousins, 2001) or that physical activity may be harmful in midlife and beyond (McPherson, 1984). A few of the participants questioned the value of sport and exercise activity for their health, at this stage in their life. Here there was some resistance to the general assumption that exercise is good for health, based on their personal experiences of pain and discomfort.

Jane raised the question of whether sport and exercise is always good for you, as you get older. Some who had suffered injuries also expressed this. The questioning of the suitability of physical activity at this age is also linked to a theme I discuss later, about deferring participation at this age stage, and the implications of getting back into exercise as fitness declines. However, Jane was in a minority, in contrast to most who considered that exercise could have a positive health effect and only being concerned about the social age appropriateness of sport activity. My findings do not show the same degree of participants feeling 'too old', unlike Scott-Porter's who found that there was a tendency among the middle-aged, male participants to '...view oneself as old having reached middle age; almost accepting that their bodies would deteriorate' and thinking that 'it is too late now' to start participating again (2002, p.36).

Sport was seen as 'youthful' and in general was regarded as more suitable for children and young people, and this was linked to considering whether the same activity was suitable for themselves, particularly as they moved into the mid-life stage and also had children themselves. These findings are in line with McPherson who explains that there is "...a cultural or subcultural devaluation of physical activity and sport for adults" (1984, p.219). This suggests a change in the meaning

and value of physical activity at this life stage (Atchley, 1999). Partington et al. also suggested that the mid-life reflection is likely because of "...sport's emphasis upon the young, fit, performing body and the short duration of the athletic career..." (2005, p.86). The findings suggest that there is a consideration of whether a sport identity is acceptable as they move into mid-life. Haraven suggested that to understand mid life meaning there is a need to relate it to other life stages and this can be applied to the participants understanding of sport.

..[T]he role and position of adults [*in relation to sport and physical activity*]...are related to the treatment of children and youths [*in relation to sport and physical activity*].

(Haraven, 1995, p.121)²

The findings in the section above can be interpreted by looking at understanding of ageing from the previous literature. Whilst age can be linked to biological conceptualisation the '...meanings are socially and culturally determined' (Haraven, 1995, p.121). Clearly the participants have concerns with physical decline, age appropriate behaviour and acceptability of identity based on sport at this stage. There are questions over whether they can line up sport participation with their current life stage. Levinson et al. described a mid-life transition, occurring usually around 40 or 41 years of age and lasting about five years (1978, p.191-192). He suggested that there are three major tasks for an individual during that time; terminate early adulthood and evaluate it, initiate middle adulthood and test new choices, and deal with the young to old polarity. Certainly participants in my study looked back with nostalgia to their participation in youth and early adulthood and did look forward with concern to getting older, with some worried about physical decline and loss of youth. However, most accepted that an age based decline in physical activity was normal, and in the same way McPherson talks about age based normative beliefs:

...age-based norms concerning behaviour perceived as appropriate or inappropriate at a given stage in life, and by changing opportunity sets that require a continuous process of adaption.

(McPherson, 1984, p.219)

Atchley and Barausch neatly sum up the social and physical concerns about the appropriateness of sport and physical activity in mid-life:

² The additions in italics are my own.

Middle aged people who are highly involved in job, family, and community responsibilities may find it difficult to allot time to stay at a level of physical conditioning that allows strenuous activity without discomfort. In addition there is a general expectation (age norm) that after age 35 or 40, people should be exempt from pressures to involve themselves in strenuous activities.

(Atchley & Barausch, 2004, p.280/281)

However, the issues associated with participation in mid-life seem to contradict with the view expressed earlier in this chapter that individuals felt a pressure to participate as they grew older, and particularly as they contemplated moving into midlife. This is explained by looking closer at the type of activity that was deemed to be appropriate, as whilst sport was seen as inconsistent with midlife, fitness and health related exercise was viewed as consistent with the sense of self now. There was talk of a need to increase their exercise participation as they grow older, and elsewhere a need to decrease sport participation and sense that this should be in the past, this was considered to be a normal expectation. This may be evidence of social change, to dominant promotion of the message to be physically active for health.³ This is supported by Scott-Porter's (2002) findings, explored in Chapter 2. These contradictory views add to conflictual feelings around sport at this life stage which I explore in the second half of this chapter. As Atchley and Barausch (2004) note most had moved into multiple roles in midlife, and for most this included a facilitating role for their own children's sport involvement, again polarising a young and old connection to sport, which I explore more later. Whilst perceptions of ageing created individual expectations of participation appropriateness, added to this the roles played at this point in their lives, had a dramatic impact on sport and physical activity involvement. As the participants had developed further their adult responsibilities (partnerships, having children, career development) participation had been reconsidered. In the next section I look at the impact of other roles on sport and physical activity participation.

³ For example the Everyday Sport Campaign (Sport England, 2005c) aims to build physical activity into everyday lives. Internal Sport England (Sport England, 2005c) research showed that this was "...interpreted as a physical activity campaign and not necessarily a sport campaign". Likewise Sport England's (2007d) promoting tool kits suggest that for women from 31-55 years of age activity providers should "promote sport with strong emphasis on health and well-being".

6.4.2 Role conflict

6.4.2.1 Family role conflict

Whilst age suitability to activity was an issue, another level of conflict was evident. Some felt that participating in activities, affected their ability to fulfil other responsibilities, and whilst they might feel compelled to exercise, they also felt compelled to put their partner and/or family first. The study included mainly individuals in marriages⁴ and parents⁵. Many of the individuals had young children and all of them talked about the effect of family life on any sport or exercise participation. The following comments from Emma about her future intentions in sport, indicate the practical constraints of meeting other role requirements, as she says:

... I'll still carry on swimming. But...now that I'm actually nearly working full time and I come in, in the evenings do the tea and things like that I just haven't got the time to go out. The time I have got I just spend here really... Coming home, do washing and ironing, like any normal working housewife would be really...but no I haven't done any sport. I mean I keep saying about going back to Keep Fit and maybe I will but that's when it's lighter nights as well. I mean I do drive but [*my husband*] wouldn't let me go when it's dark. Maybe when it's lighter yeah, I'll get the enthusiasm going and go back to Keep Fit. But again it's the time factor. I mean by the time I get in and get the children's tea, it's like half past seven, eight o'clock and then I've got ironing to do... You know it's either like do I go out and leave it all or do I get it done and if I don't do it just means I'm so far behind the next day...So it's really having the time and I really sometimes I think I should make time, make the effort and do it.

(Emma)

Emma shows an evident tension between meeting role requirements, and evidence of her husband's control of where he allows his wife to go alone, after dark (like Deem, 1986). But despite these issues Emma still has a desire to, and sense that she should, do more physical activity, than her regular swimming.

6.4.2.2 Family orientation

For the mothers in particular their children's well-being was a priority, and for all participants with family, its 'significance and centrality' (Shaw, 1996, p.4) was

⁴ Three participants, Rob, Jackie and John, were single (one divorced).

⁵ Four participants, Ben, Jackie, Phil and Rob, did not have children.

evident. The notion that sport had less of a place in female life was tied up with the family orientation of all the female participants in particular. Whilst the participants did not appear to describe sport as un-feminine, they did appear to distance themselves from it as an activity that would compromise their role in caring for their family. Looking after their children, partner and home was central to their lives and the children came first. This is illustrated for example where Emma further commented on how family was the absolute priority

...when you have the children you just don't really have the time. I suppose you could have made time but at the time it was no big thing. You know I didn't think 'oh gosh I've got to go out and play tennis', You know I just kind of like forgot about it for a while...we just like took the children swimming. We wanted them to learn to swim and we took them at an early age but it really was a social family outing, it was still swimming but it was no where, didn't see it as a fitness thing then really...I wasn't really bothered about it for my own benefit...I suppose I concentrated more on my family rather than my social life or...any sport. I didn't really think of sport as an activity that I had to do then, it was just kind of like [*she pauses*]...not forgotten about but just really it wasn't part of my life then. I didn't think 'oh I've got to do sport, I've got to keep fit, I've got to keep this going'. I just didn't think about it then. I just kind of like forgot about it.

(Emma)

The mother's effort was engaged in supporting the children in general and this included taking a motivational and practical role in encouraging them to participate in sport. Whilst they took this responsibility, at the same time in most cases they were neglecting and putting off taking care of their own exercise and health to the degree they desired. This reflects an idealised notion of the 'good' mother as home based, selfless, available for her family 24 hours a day, and totally responsible for her own children all the time (Currie, 2004, p.225; Forna, 1999; Weedon, 1987) which has been illustrated in previous studies examining the ideology of, and discourses associated with motherhood (Lewis & Ridge, 2005; Mauthner, 1994; Wearing, 1990).

The mothers in this study had gone through a major life transition of having children and establishing a young family, but most had finished having children. Kelly (1983) and, Rapoport and Rapoport (1975) refer to establishment phases; all the participants had young children at school, or pre-school age, therefore falling to an early- mid establishment phase characterised by personal concern about conflicts of energies, and loyalty and obligation increases (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975, p.186). These

mothers faced pressure from multiple roles and responsibilities; paid employment, domestic and childcare (Deem & Gilroy, 1998, Thomsson, 1999, Willming & Gibson, 2000). Other authors have found that the early establishment phase is most time demanding (Levinson et al. 1978, 1996) and constraining on leisure (Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Willming & Gibson, 2000). Deem & Gilroy commented that mothers of young children are likely to do no physical activity, "...other than walking (often not by choice but as a means of transport) and housework" (1998, p.101). In contrast the participants, who were mothers in my study, did a more varied range of physical activity but it was clear that some did little more than Deem and Gilroy's observation. The comments made illustrate the peak in energy on family and it is apparent that "how much time to give to her children versus her husband, at what standard to maintain the home..." (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975, p.197) were still the key concerns before considering self.

6.4.2.3 Deferment

For those who did not exercise at all, they did envisage a time when they might participate again, when they felt able to leave their children more. Several commented on plans for exercising, but stated that for the moment being a 'mother' had to come first. Heather noted that once her children started school she went to the gym more, but even before that she had used the crèche in the gym. Jane thought about future participation:

You know once the children are a bit older, I could probably pop along in the evening and swim for a few lengths and come back home...Whether I ever do, (pause) that's my intention...I can concentrate on myself again you're getting older all the time...

(Jane)

However, as this comment shows Jane, like other participants showed a concern that her intentions might never be realised as she grew older. They were concerned that the likelihood of future participation was becoming very questionable, as they felt trapped by a vicious cycle of lack of fitness or injury, which made any participation difficult or painful. At the present time, it was clear that the children came first and whilst the women noted that their partners participated frequently, they felt they could not, as this comment illustrates:

I've seen things, local things advertised and I've thought 'oh, I'd love to do that' but I can't really, I've got this commitment, I've got that commitment, I've got the children really. Yeah, and you've got all those things pulling on you.
(Jane)

Other studies show that the intentions can be realised. Willming and Gibson interviewed parents in mid-establishment phase and found that for women this:

...eased their abilities to negotiate and resist motherly roles because their children were more independent and self-sustaining. And so, these mothers had more freedom to experience and value the importance of leisure as a separate space in their lives.

(Willming and Gibson, 2000, p.138)

However, for the moment the participants in this study were climbing to a peak in family centred activities in the mid-establishment phase.

6.4.2.4 Relegating self and the fear of selfishness

This overall theme of parenting and physical activity role conflict was linked to the finding that participants constructed mothering as always about putting their children first. The finding is supported by Wearing's (1990) data on mothers being constantly available to their children. At the same time, all of the men who had children, also mentioned some conflict with their family role, however whilst there was compromise for some, a few had managed considerable amounts of regular participation in sport. It became apparent in the interviews that some of the women had little sense of self, apart from as parent/partner. Taking care of others was important to their sense of self and was valued and taken seriously. In effect their lack of participation in sport was part of distancing themselves from any activity that involved 'putting themselves first' and seemed to be a way in which they demonstrated that they were a good 'carer'.

The findings presented above can be understood by considering the 'ethic of care' (Gilligan, 1993). The ethic of care, described as 'the activity of relationships' (Henderson & Allen, 1991, p.97) is often associated with the emphasis placed by women on their role, responsibility and commitment as caregivers in a life lived in key familial relationships (Bedini & Phoenix, 1999ab; Gilligan, 1993; Adams &

Walton, 2002), particularly good mothering (Currie, 2004). The theory suggests that women will place greater importance on sustaining relationships, as opposed to expecting to live by an ethic of justice. A number of studies have established that the ethic of care is a key barrier against participation in sport and physical activity (Brown et al, 2001; Currie, 2004, Henderson & Allen 1991) and in leisure (Bedini & Phoenix, 1999a; Harrington et al, 1992, Henderson & Allen, 1991; Wearing, 1990) for women who have relationship commitments, because of sense of non-entitlement to, and guilt about, participation. Lewis and Ridge proposed that “Whether women are active or not, the ethic of care is absolutely central to women’s decision making and it is the underlying principle which they use in weighing up the effort against the rewards to be gained from being physically active” (2005, p.14). Therefore as caring for others was central for many participants, this was put before own needs including sport and physical activity as leisure and health (Henderson & Allen, 1991).

I have shown how the parents placed a greater emphasis on their role as parents, than on participation. They talked about how they planned their lives to meet the needs of their family. Participation decisions were guided by their desire to care for others and to have good relationships, due to the centrality of these relationships (Henderson & Allen, 1991; Herridge et al, 2003; Thomsson, 1999; Tirone & Shaw, 1997, Willming & Gibson, 2000). This is supported by other studies which suggest that this is an inevitable part of parenting, as Shaw et al. found parents “...ranked family time and time with children as more important than personal time” (2003, p.27). Overall Gilligan refers to women experiencing a sense of morality or what one ‘should’, ‘ought’, and ‘better do’ and, ‘right’, ‘good’, ‘bad’ behaviour as a sense of moral responsibility for others (1993, p.74). Whilst the participants in this study did not use moral language to describe what they should do in relation to their parenting or domestic role, unlike how they spoke about health behaviour, it is apparent that they have accepted the priority of this role and their children’s interests.

Essentially there was a conflict in meeting role expectations and this meant that they questioned the legitimacy of taking time out for themselves for sport and physical activity (Henderson, 1996). Relegating their own participation desires and needs was considered a natural act, which was almost an integral part of being a good parent. Previous research has shown that a strong ethic of care led to a sense of lack of

entitlement to time out for leisure (Henderson, 1991, Henderson & Allen, 1991; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991, Herridge et al, 2003). The concept of rights is in tension with the ethic of care (Gilligan, 1993, p.21). Studies on sport and physical activity found that women had little access to time and also do not feel that they have a right to participate (Chambers, 1986; Deem, 1986; Harrington et al, 1992; Thomsson, 1999; Woodward et al 1989). The participants suggested that there was always childcare and domestic work to be done and this is supported by Henderson and Allen who found that "...many women are never free from obligations and gender roles; 'unobligated time' does not exist" (1991, p.102). Even for women in later life, acting on the ethic of self care or leisure required negotiation of the ethic of care (Gibson et al, 2002a).

In contrast some previous research has brought forth different findings on entitlement to sport and leisure. They found women who felt they needed to be fit to take care of others in order to better fulfil other roles (Freeman et al, 2006; Lewis & Ridge, 2005). Whilst my participants were aware at the same time of a need to take care of their health (as discussed earlier in the chapter), clearly this did not always win out against the pressure to meet other obligations and I discuss this later when I consider the conflictual position many participants found themselves in. In fact Lewis and Ridge also found that even where the women in their study found it important to take care of themselves, the maternal 'ethic of care' made it difficult for them to find time for themselves over childcare and domestic responsibilities (2005, p.7). Currie sums up the key tensions:

The prospect of women engaging in leisure purely for pleasure is antithetical to societal expectations that we should put others' needs before our own. A women's sense of self-care through leisure or her own self-worth has often been eroded. (Currie, 2004, p.108)

The construction of being a 'good parent' was clearly based around the notion of unselfishness (Forna, 1999; Weedon, 1987). The women in my study were modest; they did not make great claims about being 'unselfish'. Instead, their view about the conflict between sport and family relationships was evident in what they said about others participation. As Hargreaves comments women's leisure is "...inextricably interwoven with their responsibilities as wives and mothers" (1994, p.186). With this in mind, some of the women were critical of others who took sport seriously. They

referred to other's behaviour in morally sanctioning ways and it was evident that they scrutinised the behaviour of others and themselves against social norms. Several of them commented on the sport participation of their partners or their own fathers, and its negative impact on family life. They contrasted themselves when they talked about the problems of others' sport participation where it clashed with fulfilling other roles, such as domestic duties and family holidays. Ainsworth et al, (2003) suggested that if a woman's view of others who exercised was favourable, they were more likely to exercise themselves, accepting that they could put themselves first. This supports Lewis and Ridge's finding from their study that "Less active women tended to view time for physical activity as 'selfish' – time away from their responsibilities which could undermine the wellbeing of their family" (2005, p.9). Henderson and Allen (1991), and with Bialeschki (1991), and Thomsson (1990) found that the fear of selfishness was a fundamental constraint on participation, with women expressing that they felt guilt, selfish and 'morally conflicted' (Henderson & Allen, 1991, p.99). As Gilligan commented:

...a concern with individual survival comes to be branded as "selfish" and to be counterposed to the "responsibility" of a life lived in relationships. And in turn responsibility becomes, in its conventional interpretation, confused with a responsiveness to others that impedes a recognition of the self.

(Gilligan, 1993, p.127)

Rachel and Keith, married partners, who were interviewed separately provide a useful illustration of this type of moral conflict. They spoke of the tension between them because of the impact of Keith's participation on his domestic and family contribution, and this can be seen in the following extracts:

Rachel

As I say it's the one area where Keith and I just can't understand even where the other person is coming from because it's [*his sport participation*] obviously so fundamental to him, so much part of his life that to me it's not even an issue that I waste my time thinking about.

I don't mind them playing [*football*] but it's the level that he's committed and the fact that we have to re-arrange, like for example...we were going to go away, our first proper holiday in years, and then after I booked it he said I don't know how to tell you this but that's our Cup Final and our presentation evening that week. I mean he wasn't saying that we couldn't go but that was the implication. And it's his involvement at football at all levels, he runs the team at church so that's a lot of effort and then they talk about the match afterwards, they've just played the match and then they've got to talk about it! I mean before he used to go across on a

Saturday to watch 'Football Focus', then 'Final Score', then 'Match of the Day'⁶. I mean he doesn't do that now but it was so all consuming...maybe he's an extreme example, the level that he takes it to.

...before my Dad got married he was very sporty he used to go skiing, he used to go rock climbing, water sports and when he got married, my Gran took him to one side and said 'you're getting married, now you've got responsibilities...you're going to have to stop' and I think it was more the dangerous sports like the hill climbing, so he religiously had his golf on a Saturday morning so I don't know if there was some resentment there on his part.

(Rachel)

Keith

...it not exactly creates tensions but we just have such different outlooks on it that there's no real meeting of minds there and I think Rachel again has been very understanding and very accommodating of, in particular my involvement in football but she just cannot really...understand my, the kind of sacrifices I might make and so on in order to play. So there's just very different values at work there between us and I suppose there's always a sense of trying to take into consideration the fact that Rachel won't be involved in sport and won't be interested in sport and I sort of need to make allowances for that as well really. Whereas I suppose if Rachel were more sporty and more enthusiastic about getting involved in sport then there would be less conflict there and it would be nice to think we could even participate in sport together but that doesn't really happen...So yes I think...were Rachel more interested and inclined then I think it might make a difference.

And then [*my child*] coming along certainly has...made a big difference as well...especially at the moment because we both work full time, therefore evenings and weekends become fairly crucial, just very important times to have time for [*my child*] and therefore that means obviously less time for other things, sport being one of them. So marriage and parenthood have been fairly significant.

(Keith)

Whilst Keith feels he does compromise his activity because of family life, he still maintains a high level of activity and Rachel considers this to be detrimental to family life. Rachel's comments about her Grandmother's expectations of her Father's change in sport participation on marrying her mother are interesting. She notes that her Father's participation changed and this appears to be in contrast to Keith's. Keith speaks of a total disagreement with Rachel over his participation and how this was the one area in which they 'could not understand each other', however he manages to maintain his participation despite this tension. In contrast several of the participants, who did participate in exercise or sport activities, spoke of wanting to participate more, but feeling that they could not because of satisfying their family's needs.

⁶ These are UK Television programmes.

6.4.2.5 Conflicts experienced by Fathers

In the case of the male participants it was clear that they had reduced or ceased participation because of family responsibilities, however some of them felt able to recommence participation once they had settled into fatherhood. There was talk from the male participants of not being able to increase participation, as they could not 'do that to the family' and several of the women noted that male sport participants they knew could have a selfish impact on family life. The men, with families, that I interviewed also shared some concerns about the conflict between participation and being there for their children or partner. For example, Craig on moving to a new city considered joining a new rugby club, but:

Didn't feel I could do that from a family point and enjoy it....I did look around for gyms but...by that stage we'd two kids so it was impossible from a time point of view.

(Craig)

For a few of the men the impact of entering a significant relationship on their participation was remembered as being more difficult than family impact. Several of the active participants noted that they felt a need to reduce their participation when they were in a permanent relationship (however, not all of them reduced their participation). Phil talked about settling into a new life with his wife as a transition, where he deprioritised sport and then later fitted this in around his new relationship. Again Keith noted the impact of having to think about someone else when deciding how to use his spare time, as he said:

I suppose as a single guy whatever other commitments I had I was still basically free to do what I wanted when I wanted and to be pretty well spontaneous you know so if someone phoned up for a game of tennis or whatever then I could drop everything and go, pretty much without reference to anyone else. But being married its just very different and you have to be more organised, you can't always just be spontaneous and obviously wanting to give time to Rachel and our marriage and our relationship, and our home life, that's been a big thing.

(Keith)

The other male participants tended to talk more about the impact of family life. When they first started a family several commented on a cessation of participation or a reduction. The highest level sportsperson that I interviewed, Craig, noted that he did not look to actively become involved in sport again because of his young family, however time and mental pressures of work and career and lack of suitable

opportunities also had a combined impact. The male participants experienced similar problems from conflict with their care giving role, to the women (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), but it was most consuming for the women and it was apparent that all the men had managed to continue with greater participation than the females. In particular three of the male interviewees had carried on with considerable amounts of sport participation. Phil and Keith spoke repeatedly of being concerned about the impact on family life, however in contrast to others they carried on participating anyway, with little evidence of compromise. Phil was aware that his partner suffers when he has less time to spend as a couple. He said

I'm conscious of the fact that I do spend a lot of time running and I think that maybe I should spend more time with my wife. She says I do too much and I have to compromise there you know, really it's only fair on her that I watch it because I am a little obsessive in a way and I've got to watch that, it is something that I have got to think about, so I've got to say 'oh we will go away this weekend or we'll go out tonight'. I like to try and do things spontaneously like that, they show that I'm thinking about her. She's very supportive of me and will turn up and watch me at races and I think she does enjoy that.

(Phil)

But Phil did not see a need to change his participation and instead tried to make good his neglect of this significant relationship in other ways.

The findings on the male participants' experiences of family role conflict are slightly different to other studies, with more participants talking about the conflict of family life and evidencing its constraining effect on their participation. Henderson and Allen made the assumption "...that many women differ from men and from one another concerning the ethic of care and how it impacts their leisure" (1991, p.99), however they also note that men do experience the ethic of care and said that "We must be careful not to use the ethic of care to reinforce existing social differences" (p.107). My findings suggest that the ethic of care did affect participation for most of the men, but it was less constraining than for the female participants. For example some of the male participants who were keen sportsmen found that they were still able to maintain a 'good level' of participation. Perhaps:

...the ethos of masculinity associated with sport participation, and its high cultural value as a social practice, provides [*these*] men with a legitimate means by which they are able to abdicate this responsibility, contributing to absentee fathering and dysfunctional marriages.

(Thompson, 1995, p.132)

However, their participation was less than they would have liked and they were in a minority.

Other male participants talked about significantly reducing their participation, although it is clear that only one, Craig felt that because of his commitment to family he must withdraw from all sport and physical activity. They find more support from Scott-Porter who looked specifically at the experiences of middle aged men, also noted family impacts, as he said:

The family was the main priority for men in their mid years, both in terms of sustaining good relationships and providing financial security and material comforts now and in the future. Those activities or concerns that are driven by personal interest, such as the involvement in physical activity, tended to be viewed as secondary.

(Scott-Porter, 2002, p.39)

Many of the men in Scott-Porter's (2002) study viewed sport and physical activity as something that could have negative impact on the quality of family life, as a selfish behaviour taking one away to pursue an activity independently or with friends, and therefore, sacrificing family time. This matches the type of concerns expressed by Craig and Phil above. This may reflect social change, as research has shown that whilst mothers still take the major share of household and domestic activities, fathers are increasingly expected to take a different fathering relationship, with more care for children and engagement in their activities, rather than the traditional focus on discipline only (JRF, 2000). There has also been some increase in men requesting flexible working in order to look after their children (Mills, 2007). This supports my findings which show that the ethic of care does have resonance in light of what the men, as well as women in my study say about moral conflict over sport and physical activity participation at the expense of meeting others' needs.

There are issues with the application of Gilligan's (1993) 'ethic of care' theory to men. Early in her research she suggested that the ethic of care was not only for women and did apply to men, but her research and theoretical development excluded men. As Henderson and Allen note:

While the ethic of care is not a construct only for women, it generally has been associated with women. When taking care of others is almost always first in a

woman's life, her "freedom to" and "freedom from" are often limited especially in relationship to leisure...

(Henderson and Allen, 1991, p.99)

However, Kelly also commented (1983) that '...for most establishment adults, the family comes first' (1983, p.72). Likewise Sellar and Boshoff in a study of older Australian's, found that both men and women suggested that they felt guilt when at leisure, including participating in sport- because there was a "...perception that there were other occupations that one 'should' do or was 'supposed' to be doing" (2006, p.216).

My findings do show that whilst the 'ethic of care' applies to men and women, this is greatly magnified in the experience of women and this is supported by others (Henderson & Allen, 1991; Thomsson, 1999, Tirone & Shaw, 1997). This type of constraint was more salient for women than men. As Willming and Gibson (2000) found in their study of working men and women with children, family role responsibilities were a source of conflict with leisure, but the women experienced greater role conflict with work and family. "For women in paid labour, domestic roles continue to remain central to their identities, while men's identities are more likely to be tied to economic producing roles" (Willming & Gibson, 2000, p.122).

6.4.2.6 Difficulties of organising physical activity due to family responsibilities

The constraints on participation arising from the family focus of the females was even more evident when they started to describe the difficulties associated with organising participation. They felt the need for their participation to be invisible and to have no detrimental effect on family life. In all cases the women made certain that any participation did not impact on family life and participated without requiring any support from their partner. The women talked about individual activity participation that took place at the same time and location as their children's activities and of activities with their children: "...Because the children were a little bit older and again they could participate in things with me...They'd go swimming and we'd go for a train and then a swim" (Emma).

The restriction of participation to times when activity is invisible to other family members was also noted by Thompson (1995) in her study of female tennis players. However, my findings suggest that independent activity at other times is more difficult. Whilst some felt able to participate whilst their children were at school or in bed at night, they ensured that they were back in the house to look after the children and fulfil evening domestic responsibilities. Kate in particular talked about her preference for outdoor activities and dance classes that 'I can fit into my life easily'. She talked about deliberately finding activities and classes that she could complete efficiently, managing the maximum exercise possible, whilst minimising her time away from home and life. She wanted to arrive, participate immediately and leave straight afterwards, without having to spend time setting up an activity or socialising, as she says about dance classes and then about walking and kayaking:

It helps if the class starts and finishes on time, it's really annoying if you get there early or you're there and she doesn't start because people arrive late and you start ten minutes late or you finish fifteen minutes late. If you've got children and you have to get home to make sure they've done their homework and got things ready, it's really irritating.

...there's no wasting time it's all movement, it's working all parts of your body...I suppose just knowing exactly what you have to do really and not wasting time and thinking 'oh god, this is such a waste of time'. Whereas if you go for a long walk, you're not wasting any time really, just start walking and keep walking.

... kayaking is wonderful because you can put the kayak on the roof of the car and you lift it off at the other end put it in the water and away you go.

(Kate)

This need to 'fit in' participation with others needs was also evident when Rachel talked about how she finished work earlier than she should, in order to go to the gym. It was evident that in her mind this time use was justifiable because she was using time already allocated to another responsibility, rather than to her family. As she said "...so it fits in with that, it's not any extra time. It's time off my working day..." In this way, Rachel avoids having to compensate for time lost from family time, as "Time is a veiled currency which they have to both 'earn' and 'repay' in order to care for themselves" (Lewis & Ridge, 2005, p.8). There was a sense that their participation must be invisible and that in this way it did not negatively impact on their relationships and taking care of others. This was a practical issue of time management, but at root was about putting their children first and the idea of putting

themselves first was not considered. The women felt that participation was difficult because it would involve using time that needed to be used elsewhere. Thompson (1995) also found that female tennis players, managed and structured the tennis played to 'accommodate rather than disrupt, their responsibilities for the care of their families'. Several studies established that women are left with little time to attend to their own health needs in terms of stress relief, body optimisation and well-being (Currie, 2004; Lewis & Ridge, 2005; Thomsson, 1999).

The women made no mention of practical support, such as others taking care of their children whilst they participated, and yet some of the women saw this as barrier to participation. Females had a sense that significant relationships alter participation and yet seemed to think this had less impact on men within relationships. Rachel aptly illustrated this view when she talked about memories of her grandmother talking to her father about the need to stop playing some sports because of his responsibilities on marrying her mother. Males, who continued participating in sport in adult life, appeared to assume the support of their partner. Although they did not mention needing the support, they did mention some guilt or conflict regarding participation and as a result neglect of relationships with their partner and family.

These findings can be understood in relation to the previous literature. Whilst most of the women participated in some sport or physical activity, this was negotiated and where possible this took place at times when their absence could not be noticed by their children. These were planned activities where the mothers chose the time carefully, rather than just taking "...time out when they please..." (Currie, 2004, p.226). The mothers did not show a sense of entitlement to personal time for sport and physical activity, they did not talk about the 'time out', gaining of a 'space of one's own' that Currie (2004) found in her study of mothers taking part in an exercise group. In contrast in my study although some of the mothers with young children used crèche facilities this was rare and instead they participated in activity when their children were taking part in sports, in bed, or on occasions when their partner looked after them. Additionally the female participants suffered because of a double workload of paid and domestic work and the expectation, that they will take on all of this. Greater responsibilities for housework and child care (Doucet, 1995) left them feeling physically and emotionally tired and a lack of time, energy and

support from others was an intervening constraint on participation (Currie, 2004; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2000; Henderson & Allen, 1991).

6.4.2.7 The impact of career development

At the same time as the role conflict with family responsibilities, all the participants worked and this, in particular for the women, who took a greater burden of child and domestic care, left little time for leisure (Henderson, 1991; Kleiber, 1999; Willming & Gibson, 2000). Balancing family and work role responsibilities and other activity, such as sport has been referred to more appropriately as ‘juggling’ (Brown et al, 2001; Miller & Brown, 2005). Whilst time spent on paid work was a constraint on sport participation (see also Carpenter, 1997; Kelly, 1983; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975), for some the development of a career also had an impact (Ricciardio, 2004). Some noted that after working all day and then taking on family responsibilities they were too tired to exercise, as these comments show:

I would do a full days work, get on the bus and go home and then I'd be sitting thinking 'oh I've got to go back out again'. I think going back in the evening was very difficult whereas, now I can do it with work.

(Rachel)

It was too much...I mean the difference is that at university you can get away with it because you do have spare time.

(Craig talking about rugby practice)

Several of the participants found it difficult to maintain continuous involvement in an activity, either because of moving location for work or working shifts, as Penny said:

Time...because I did the St. John Ambulance and I've been quite involved in those over the years so I haven't had the evenings free and at weekends I was either at camps or things. And also my nursing has meant shift work, so shift work doesn't help when you're trying to do something like that. Basically when you've finished you can't find the time of energy to do those activities.

(Penny)

Some suggested that participation with other people was needed to motivate them, but that there are problems where they rely on external organisations and people to organise sport, as they cannot change the timings in order to fit their own work

timetable. Craig who had been a committed rugby player had resigned himself to the practical constraints of his work as he said:

I'd been on holiday, and on holiday I can go running, I go running every day, but no sooner did I get back here...time disappears...I now accept that I haven't got the time to spend half an hour or an hour going running, that I'll go cycling as and when I can but I still need to do something regularly, and the only option I can see at the moment is to go back to where I started from, and really just to do exercise once a night ad hoc.

(Craig)

This finding is not uncommon as time available after work and family was fragmented, and unpredictable demands made participation difficult to plan, especially with others (Lewis & Ridge, 2005). Career development also had an impact. As noted in the previous chapter, whilst sport had played a stimulating role where they were in situations of unemployment or unchallenging work, their career now played that role. This is exemplified by Craig's case, as he had seen the increasing challenge of work; make the challenge of sport less relevant to him.

I do get challenged in business life now, where at that sort of age group I was too low, too far down the tree in a sense, you were given things to do as opposed to pushing things along, if that makes sense.

(Craig)

The importance of work commitment to the survival of the family in this midlife phase was apparent, and others (Carpenter, 1997; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975) suggest that the work ethic is legitimated as an important social and moral value. The mid-life transition is related to work achievement and a concern about meeting work goals, and subsequently there is a change in identity to more work or career focus.

6.4.2.8 Combined role conflict

The findings illustrate the concerns about fulfilling responsibilities expected at this life stage. All my respondents had '...multiple roles and responsibilities in families, workplaces and communities' (Lewis & Ridge, 2005, p.3). For some of the participants, their current sport and physical activity participation had been clearly influenced by conflict with other roles, particularly parenting and career development. This was an argument of previous authors who highlighted the problems of accommodating sport participation, alongside the role overload (Kleine

et al, 2006) associated with the establishment phase of family and production (see Carpenter, 1997; Kelly, 1983; Kleiber, 1999; Lewis & Ridge, 2005; Scott-Porter, 2002; Thomsson, 1999). Gibson (2005) usefully applied both role (Zurcher, 1979; Turner, 1956), life cycle (Levinson et al, 1978, 1996) and family life cycle (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975) theories in an essay on understanding the roles of sports tourists across a lifetime. She found in her work with Yiannakis (Gibson, 2005, p.205) that some types of sport tourist role increase with age, others decline, while some others vary. Gibson therefore points to the socio-psychological needs variance across the lifetime. Gibson commented that:

... leisure or tourist roles can be conceptualised as ephemeral roles in that they are temporary or peripheral roles that provide individuals with the opportunity to satisfy different needs not met in their everyday lives.

(Gibson, 2005, p.200)

If sport plays a role and life evolves it might be assumed that the importance of this role may change, and there may be role demise if other areas of life are to be prioritised, as evidenced in this study. Similarly Carpenter (1997) found that both men and women ranked leisure second or third to family and work during middle adulthood.

There appeared to be a distinction between early and late adult establishment phases (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975). Some participants talked about having experienced major role conflict and change in their participation in their late 20s as they moved into significant relationships, cohabiting or getting married and establishing their careers and then having children. However, in mid-life transition there was now a concern with establishing themselves, focusing on performing effectively in family development or achieving senior status at work. Conflicts of loyalties between obligations may arise, as people move from 'novice' to 'full-fledged' adult status (Levinson et al., 1978, p.59). The women now in particular, felt a continued compression on time available for themselves (Lewis & Ridge, 2005). Some men however, felt they had reached the end of the adult establishment phase and were in a more settled routine again. For example, Phil when talking about life events says:

They have sort of obviously had some effect. Most of those life events have happened before this phase of the running that I have now got involved with and I suppose that the events that happened before hand were just part of the growing up process and changing. Now that I am sort of settled in a life pattern unless I change jobs or move house or anything else happens beyond my control, I can't see anything else changing.

(Phil)

There were others still, generally men again, who felt role conflict was just starting to bite, or was something they could only avoid confronting for so long. This consideration was made more potent when they questioned the appropriateness of considerable sport participation at this life stage and age. Keith, Phil and Andy considered how long they could go on with activity. The women had made the most changes as a result of role conflict. The men felt less compelled to make changes and had been able to negotiate around some role requirements. Other men were still feeling the ground and starting to be troubled by ageing and role conflict in relation to participation. These men were only now beginning to enter 'uncharted territory' having managed to maintain their participation to an acceptable level to themselves (Levinson et al., 1978). Perhaps these participants were still in the settling down period which Levinson et al (1978) suggests begins at 32/33, and is usually ended by 42.

Overall, the participants were aware that all choices about time use have moral implications in the sense of fulfilling roles (Henderson, 1997).

Roles are regarded as a collection of behaviours that are associated with a social position. The behaviours are largely governed by norms and social expectations and the individual role incumbent is expected to conform and to play a role rather than actively shape it in any way.

(Gibson & Pennington-Gray, 2005, p.445)

They were in a period of settling down, raising a family and working at advancement. Therefore: "In order to devote [*themselves*] to certain goals, [*they*] may have to neglect or repress important parts of the self" (Levinson et al., 1978, p.153). The participants played the roles expected of them and there was negotiation, rather than resistance. Certain relationships and roles were prominent and required that others be set aside. Midlife for these participants was clearly about providing for those who are to follow, and I consider this next (Kleiber, 1999).

6.4.3 Sense that playing sport is relevant for others (in particular children)

A theme in the interviews was that sport was viewed as an activity for others, mainly for their family and children. This was linked to the notion that sport is for childhood. There was a change to the relationship with sport as a parent, where this

was seen firstly as an activity the children took part in, and secondly as a family activity. Many had reduced their participation in sport in order to support their own children's activity. Three of the men were actively involved in organising their children's sport activity, whilst all of the parents talked about committed spectatorship and support of their children's participation. For example Andy, talked about coaching both his sons in rugby and in particular emphasised the social development they gained from this, as he said about his youngest son:

...he's not very good but I go along and watch him and encourage him to do it because...I hope they get as much out of...not necessarily the standard but just the involvement that I've always had.

(Andy)

Whilst some of the parents interviewed did continue with independent participation, even they started to see their children's participation as a greater priority. Shaw et al. found changes in the ideology of parenting roles and responsibilities, with parents concerned about their children's 'intellectual, social and emotional development' (2003, p.17) and taking on what Kitterod and Pettersen later called 'active childcare' (2006, p.486). In the parents' views sport was valued for their children's social development (Kleiber, 1999) but also because it has an importance in tackling increasing levels of childhood inactivity (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Of note was the fact that even where the parents had negative experiences of sport themselves in childhood, they still valued the activity for their own children. As Thompson observes:

Mothers with a strong commitment to quality of life for their children and a wish to provide them with every opportunity to become an accepted, healthy, well-adjusted participating member of these societies are required to support their children's sport development actively.

(Thompson, 1990, p.137)

As I have already shown, being 'bottom of the list' seemed to sum up some of the participants, particularly some of the women's, relationships with sport and physical activity, and this is consistent with the view of mothers in particular as self-sacrificing, and focused on the family (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). This finding was also linked to entitlement as regular participation in sport would lead to time away from their children which would compromise their fulfilment of not only their caring role but their servicing of family and children's sport activities (Thompson, 1990), therefore they abandoned their own interests in order to support those of others

(Henderson et al, 1989, 1999; Krenichyn, 2004; Shaw, 1997). A sense of duty to support their children's sport participation was evident and this also applied to spending money on activities or memberships for themselves.

...but when you've got commitments on your finances, you don't need finding £50 for yourself out of that. You think 'oh, I'll not, the kids might need shoes or something like that', so you tend to say, 'oh, I'll not bother' and when you've got children you always find yourself bottom on the list for anything, you're always last...So, we'd pay...for my daughter or son to do something, but you tend not to think of yourself...

(Jane)

The participants did describe a range of activities completed as a family, with swimming, cycling and walking being most often mentioned and this is backed up by other research showing that an individual with family spends most of their free time with them (Shaw, 2001). Several described how the exercise was less physically active and compromised their individual participation, so due to this it was not perceived as actual sport (Kleiber, 1999; Shaw & Dawson, 2001). The choice of activity was limited to that which could be completed with the children and the level of physical exertion and technicality had to be easy. As Heather comments "It's getting so we can do longer walks and steeper walks now. But for a long time, it was pretty easy walks we were doing. But we're still getting there". Kate noted that they had to keep activities short because her young children got bored, and now that her children were older and more physically able they had lost interest in participating in family activities and instead her time is spent supporting their individual activities.

There was a difference among interviewees as to how family activity was categorised. With some individuals all the physical activity they participate in, is family activity, rather than individual. Others were clear that participation with their children was not exercise or physical activity for them, as the level and amount of physical exertion was limited. The family participation was distinct from their individual participation, which they labelled as sport or exercise. For example Heather said: "I think if you seriously hill walk, it's good. It's very good for your legs isn't it?...It isn't strenuous enough, a lot of the hill walking we do" and as shown earlier Emma said about her family swimming "... it was no where, didn't see it as a fitness thing then really..'.

Therefore it is clear that the facilitation of family and children's sport and physical activity was to the detriment of their own activity (Shaw, 2001). Their role at this stage was to facilitate sport for others. Whilst the men initiated the activities completed together as a couple, the women organised family activity. The men talked mostly about activity participation which was separate to their family relationships. For the women if their participation was independent of the family, it was fitted in around this commitment, and their other participation was through family activity which they considered to be part of their carer role.

These findings illustrate that viewing sport as an activity for others constrained some from participation. This was further evident in the way the individuals talked about others in relation to sport, rather than themselves, when asked about their current participation, even if they did participate in some sport activity. There was a tendency to relate to sport through relationships, with children or family, rather than to consider independent activity. However, at the same time sport and physical activity as a family involved participation for the parent. This participation was 'acceptable' and did not conflict with the ethic of care, being not 'time for self', but about developing the families well being (Lewis & Ridge, 2005).

6.4.4 Issues with social support and opportunities

As was evident earlier (p.199), the sport behaviour and ability of significant others acted as reference points for desired standards of behaviour and whilst this was encouraging for some, others felt they fell short and this led to distinct feelings of difference. Jane explained how she and her husband tried to play badminton together but it ended in conflict⁷:

And I thought it was something that my husband and I could play together...because it wasn't sort of strength orientated, you know how a man could play more easily against a woman, something like that, rather than tennis seemed to be more of a physical game. Well we did play once and my husband used to hit the ball about 20 or 30 feet in the air [*she laughs*]. But he's very competitive and he couldn't play just to enjoy it, he had to play so seriously to win every time.

(Jane)

⁷ Jane's views on sports persons, based on her husband's attitude to sport, were introduced on p. 143 of Chapter 5.

Some accepted that they were different to others, and felt pride in their family's sport involvement but others felt guilty because they did not compare well against the others, and this can be seen as a corrosion of self security (Giddens, 1992). In some cases the participants compared themselves to high reference points which set unrealistic expectations for individuals without participation experience, but the guilt remained despite this unrealistic comparison.

Sport participation was an area where some of the women felt they could not understand their partners' involvement and they seemed to have more common ground with friends on sport and exercise participation. The data indicates that the sport participation of those within the individuals' social network has an impact on their own participation. Whilst most commented that they made friends through sport in childhood and early adult life, there was now a sense that participation needed to fit within existing social networks. Some commented that they did not have the time to build up new networks to participate in activities (e.g. club sport) and this was more of an issue if they moved geographically. As Craig commented:

...it's difficult when you keep moving...I have been reasonably good at it...it is a big thing to actually go to for instance a rugby club or a football club for the first time, and know that oh twenty two or forty four or however many members there are, that they all know each other...through to this point I drove it myself, I went out to find rugby clubs and football clubs that I would play for. By the time I went to London I was at the point, time wise, where I couldn't do that, and...you vaguely feel that there will be somebody around you, your colleagues who are involved in something that you can latch onto. It didn't happen.

(Craig)

Most stated that if there was to be any participation it had to be with existing friends or work colleagues who presented opportunities to them, although some still participated as an individual or with friends they had made through sport. Some had social lives derived from their sport involvement, but a few commented that this became less important as they grew older. Others found participation as an individual easier because they could complete their activity in a time frame set by them and get home, otherwise depending on others became a constraint to participation.

In conclusion, the participants had entered the mid-life stage where time pressures from family and work made participation difficult. The practical difficulties of participating were compounded by feelings that participation may not be age appropriate or could be physically damaging, and that sport was really an activity for others.

6.5 CONFLICTUAL FEELINGS ABOUT SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION

The findings above suggest that the participants were pulled in different directions with regard to sport and physical activity by cultural scripts pertaining to sport and physical activity themselves, physical and social senses of midlife established adult roles and responsibilities. My findings reveal that there were contradictory feelings and experiences about the impact of the ageing process, age appropriate behaviour and role responsibilities in mid life. As I showed earlier, the move into midlife can be seen as encouraging activity participation because of health concerns or constraining because of concerns about body decline and age appropriate behaviour. In the following sections I use Partington et al (2005) and Phoenix and Sparkes (2007) to explore the conflictual feelings about ageing. At the same time there are cultural expectations about sport and physical activity participation, particularly linked to 'healthism' (Crawford, 1980); expectations about relationships and priorities which could be in conflict with each other and in turn with the issues around ageing. I draw particularly on Leith and Shaw (1997), Thomsson (1999) and Scott-Porter's (2002) studies to interpret the conflictual feelings. I consider three responses to the conflictual feelings; first low levels or no participation, secondly participation in sport and physical activity, and thirdly participation in sufficient physical activity.

6.5.1 Low levels or no participation in sport and physical activity

For some participants there were multiple voices; an awareness that they should exercise in the form of an internalised moral voice; a personal voice centred on feelings about their own experiences of sport and exercise, and another moral voice about the need to make sure other roles and responsibilities were fulfilled.

The push out of sport centred in the main on the view that it was not as important as family and work, using their time for other roles such as child care and work was more important in their personal view. In addition, this pull into satisfying other relationships and roles was also accompanied by expectations of age appropriate behaviour. As already discussed in this chapter this centred around the perception that some considered themselves too old and were concerned about possible negative physical effects. This meant it was appropriate to reduce their participation or meant that they accepted their previous low participation levels as 'normal'. This reflects the 'Growing old gracefully' experience identified by Partington et al (2005, p.90). "This story is comprised of talk about dignity, age appropriate behaviour and bowing out when the time is right" (p.95). They found that some participants suggest that a decline in sport and physical activity participation is natural, so they accept this. They examined committed participants and identified some who had found consolation in less demanding level of participation or different activities, or a different role in sport as a coach. They suggested that participants 'jump', rather than be 'pushed'. Only one participant in my study Craig, suggested some reluctant acceptance of the need to 'jump' because he could not commit the time to train for his high level amateur rugby. My participants with low levels of participation did demonstrate this story, talking of reducing participation or justifying participation that had been low or declining for sometime. Few in Partington et al's (2005) study told this story and even then they used elements of other stories to explain their midlife participation, so it was not a pure story. In contrast, several of my participants experiences of activity at this stage, reflected a sense of 'growing old gracefully'. Many accepted the importance of age appropriate lower levels of participation because they had low levels of participation in the first instance, so did not experience a great difference between social expectations and personal behaviour.

These participants demonstrated two dominant voices; a moral voice about a social pressure to meet others needs and reduce sport participation, and for some of them, a personal voice about the declining value of sport. In the latter case, some described how they did not enjoy sport and physical activity or did not value it enough to participate. They suggested that they were a constraint on their own participation and this was exemplified in the following quote from Ben.

How important is sport? Probably, not that important. More important as a form of entertainment to watch than participate. As a participant it's nothing, no importance what at all, although I aspire to do it. I want to do it but I don't want to do it enough.
(Ben)

In the former case some of the participants put greater credence on the social forces not to participate, whilst some personally agreed more with this, in other cases this was a stronger pull, than the encouragement to exercise. Likewise their sense of entitlement to leisure time varied, after meeting the needs of others at work and home, and this had an impact on time for exercise.

...you tend to not make the effort as much, when you've got other commitments. The other commitments tend to encroach more on your time, than your own personal leisure time...personally my leisure time is less... important in my life than other things that are going on. You tend to have other things that are calling on you...and your own needs tend to get pushed back down.
(Jane)

Jane's comment exemplifies how some participants experienced the need to exercise and meet other daily life demands as unrealistic. They could not meet the standards they desired in both, and family, home and work came first. In relation to this where the participants also did not value sport and exercise highly, there were also some who questioned the cultural script which promoted sport and exercise. Similarly Deem questioned whether women want their leisure 'more like men's', with involvement in '...activities which are selfish, hierarchically organised, over-commercialised, aggressive, competitive and focused on rivalry rather than companionship' (1986, p.149).

Despite the suggestion that they were constrained from participation because of meeting others needs, as was socially expected of them; some still felt they should exercise and felt conflicted about this. They suggested that they chose not to participate out of personal preference and tended to suggest this was an active decision on their behalf or blamed themselves for not managing to exercise and meet other family and work requirements. They felt that this exemplified a lack of 'willpower' or motivation on their behalf and Heather's comments illustrate this:

I would like to go to the gym more. But it'll be my decision to prioritise other things. Whereas I think if I was really keen I would go...I just put other things first. And I mean for me to have everything sorted out at home and then at the weekends there's

always stuff to do with the kids. But I think if I was keen. So I think it's my decision that I don't go.

(Heather)

In Heather's comments above, there is evidence of domestic obstacles to participation and the reference to 'me' shows that she perceives that running the household is her responsibility. Yet at the same time she has the perception that it is a matter of her own choice not to participate in sport activity, rather than a matter of her constraint, as she is not willing to negotiate the constraint. This is an interesting point, considering whether the participants were failing to participate out of choice or excluding their own needs in order to fulfil other social roles and responsibilities. Several of the participants described heavy domestic and work loads and noted that child care workload led to practical participation access problems. However, the sense that they were to 'blame' for their non-participation is also evident in the following from Penny about her lack of home based fitness activity:

...I've got keep fit videos up there...but I'm not very good at disciplining myself. I'm not one that sort of comes down and puts it on. You have to be able to discipline yourself...And again it's the time thing, I come home and I'm sure you know with marking and lessons that take forever to prepare and with the house. I'm not very good with time management really.

(Penny)

As can be seen in Penny's comment, participants did identify constraints imposed on them, which were obstacles such as work, partners' work and childcare so lower levels of participation could be seen as a result of their social situation, but they were mainly seen as their individual problem (as found in Henderson & Ainsworth 2000, Leith & Shaw, 1997; Thomsson, 1999). The participants did identify common constraints beyond their control, with other women, parents or getting older and several talked at length about difficult external obstacles, but they rarely blamed social issues for their non-participation. They suggested that internal obstacles such as motivation, lack of willpower, laziness, tiredness and ability were the greatest barrier and the real reasons of their non-participation. In fact some suggested that participation was within their control and if they had greater willpower and discipline they could participate, despite other external obstacles that they stated. They suggested that the greatest barrier was 'themselves' and some suggested that the other obstacles that they cited were 'excuses'. Ben comments on why his participation had reduced were typical:

I can't be bothered. Lazy attitude, again the social thing I don't know people there or whatever...also although it's just an excuse...it's easier if you've got a car...if you're going swimming and you're coming out and you're getting on a bicycle or a motorbike or the bus and your hair's wet and it's not very nice or you're going when it's dark and rainy, so you don't want to go. So that's another thing if you have the right transportation, the right facilities so it's nice and warm, comfortable and easy. Also sometimes you have to go there and join a club and sign this and be this and maybe I won't like it anyway, so what's the point ... If I wanted to do sport I could do, if I had the energy for it. So I suppose your average job you can make time...put it this way one of the main limits on my participation in sport has been me, myself...Although...if there had been a lot more on offer, like at school, if they'd been chucking it in your face, 'you can do whatever you want', 'you can go go-karting...and shooting or whatever'. If there'd been more choice, whether it was like 'you can do hundreds of clubs', maybe though I'd be more likely to do one.

(Ben)

Therefore contradictions were evident where they said that their non-participation was about social constraints out of participation, but then focused on issues of willpower. This is in contrast to Henderson et al (2001) who found that some people would relate their lack of involvement in physical activity in a similar way, 'primarily to themselves as individuals' (2001, p.31), but also noted that some people suggested problems were more structural than individual.

The tension between the expectations that they should exercise and the lack of participation because of external constraint or personal choice were linked to issues surrounding the self and responsibility. There was some sense of dissatisfaction with non-participation despite apparently choosing not to participate, like the findings of Leith and Shaw (1997) with young adults. Some of the participants felt guilty because whilst they realised that they could not 'do everything' (Fullagar, 2003, p.53), they still acknowledged the social expectation that they should. This also reflects the idea of constraint negotiation, as one where it is always possible to participate (Kay & Jackson, 1991). As Burrows and Wright comment "Guilt has become intimately tied to an individual's failure to achieve desirable weight and/or shape..." (2004, p.193).

It was clear that many of the participants still felt compelled to exercise, even if they did not personally like to or felt they could not give time to themselves for this. Whilst some claimed that they were happy with their choice not to participate or they accepted that they did not have the time to participate, elsewhere in the interview

feelings of dissatisfaction surfaced. This was evident in comments about hypocrisy when they considered their current view of themselves. From those who considered themselves to be healthy, a few did little planned physical exercise and this resulted in anxiety and a sense of fraudulence about the discrepancy, as Clare's comment typifies:

...I suppose I'm just lazy...I think sometimes...you should make the effort to do things...because I'm not like a sickly or an ill sort of person. But I think if you've got the...like an all round thing really, if you sort of keep yourself...I mean...I like to think of me self as healthy and I think that like sport, that's keeping yourself sort of healthy isn't it?

(Clare)

Others encouraged and supported their children's participation and felt hypocritical about this, as Peter commented "...I mean with my children I try to encourage them, a bit hypocritical [*laughs*] but I try to encourage them to do as much as possible."

This sense of conflict can be understood by applying Giddens's (1984, p.56) view (which he took from Goffman), of concerns about shame and embarrassment in sustaining of 'front' in the performance of the everyday. This "Shame bears directly on self-identity because it is essentially anxiety about the adequacy of the narrative by means of which the individual sustains a coherent biography' (Giddens, 1992, p.65). Due to this dissonance the participants felt an apparent need to justify non-participation, like Leith & Shaw also found (1997, p.357). This shows the surfacing of fears that they did not live up to the 'ideal self' (Giddens, 1992, p.68). Therefore there were inconsistencies in the way the participants now viewed sport and exercise and for those who did little or no physical exercise, there were comments made in comparison to those who participated in sport and physical activity more regularly. These other participants were labelled 'obsessive' and 'selfish' at times, in comparison to the individuals who were fully meeting their family and work needs and this was used to justify or mask concern about their low activity levels. This has been identified in previous work where freely chosen leisure was treated as 'frivolous' (Shaw, 1996, p.5). Others talked about how a little physical activity was better than none, and commonly this was activity as part of other aspects of life, rather than specific sport and physical activity.

Being 'active' was also a gendered issue, as the women were at pains to point out that they were 'active' in other ways, in order to justify their lack of sport and health and fitness activity. It was clear that whilst some of the women felt that being involved in sport and exercise activity did not fit with their sense of self as a mother, but being 'active' and exerting physical effort in other activities in contrast were important. Ekerdt (1986) referred to a 'busy ethic', a transformation of the work ethic used in relation to retirees, where there is a concern with being perceived as committed, involved and active in all aspects of life. Likewise Gibson et al. in their study of retired women's leisure experiences showed women commenting on the need to be 'active and useful' and 'not being idle' (2002a, p.277) and Thomsson (1999) established the same, as women in her study wanted to be 'active' and 'serving others'. Likewise my participants seemed to be concerned that they might be seen as 'inactive'. Being 'active' in taking care of their family was clearly central to their sense of self. Several noted that whilst they were involved in less sport than they used to be, they worked hard at other activities such as cooking, paid work, housework and childcare. As Clare noted;

...when me son came along I started working the year after he was born, in the supermarket...it was lifting heavy boxes...So I felt like I was getting enough exercise anyway. It was quite heavy and you were on the go, until sort of like 12 o'clock at night. And I think with having young un' as well... running around after them...I never sort of felt the need to do anything.

(Clare)

There were some who presented a justification for lack of sport and physical activity, saying they did enough through domestic activity and this is backed by a study from Lawton et al who presented some physically inactive respondents pointing out that '...by virtue of leading busy lives, they might be doing adequate physical activity already' (2006, p.50). In my study, whilst the women knew they were physically active, they still felt pulled by a feeling that they should do some sport related exercise. Emma talked about her current lack of sport or exercise participation, however there is a level of physical activity in her life which is evident through domestic activities. The domestic activities, and her need to do these, act as constraints on her sport participation, yet she still sees it as a matter of having the willpower to exercise. Likewise Rachel is at pains to explain that "... I'm actually a hard worker but you know if I'm working I'll put loads of energy into it, or I'm cooking or..." Being 'active' was therefore part of a person's identity as a 'moral being' (Finch & Mason, 1993, p.170) and this was deemed to be morally acceptable activity. This was similar to Henderson & Ainsworth who established that '...being physically active and being an "exerciser" were not perceived as having the same meanings for most of the women who [they] interviewed' (2000, p.320).

Finally, among those with little or no current participation, there were three different types. Firstly, there were those who did not want to have no or low participation but felt that it had to be this way because of other demands on them, suggesting an 'all or nothing' attitude to participation. They were people who had positive past experience's of the activity and had valued the benefits, as Craig said "I wouldn't want to try it again, there is more to life than rugby. I would love to play regular sport. I don't accept it but at the same time I can't see an option." Secondly there were those who accepted their lack of participation position. Some even embraced the social arguments against participation, having negative experiences of the activity, as this gave some legitimacy to their behaviour. However, in both cases the individuals did appreciate that there are benefits from exercise and felt dissatisfied and morally lax. A third type viewed their reduced participation as temporary, as the activities could not be accommodated into their current lifestyle, however as I discussed earlier in the chapter there were concerns that they might not be able to reactivate their participation. However, this was also a way to justify non-participation, as Thomsson noted of her participants, "They were not always content, but they were convinced that their time would come later" (1999, p.48).

These findings can be interpreted by considering Herridge et al, (2003) who found that carers felt a need to give into family and work role demands and social expectations related to these. Scott-Porter (2002) also showed some men who had been very active sportspersons, but with multiple role conflict and body decline, participation was seen as firmly in the past. This decline in sport and physical activity participation can be understood in terms of Kelly's (1983) definitions of core and balance activities. Core activities persist throughout the adult life course, whereas balance activities are more sensitive to changes in roles and access to opportunities. Atchley and Barusch suggest that:

Balance activities are related more to personal identity, life course stages, and roles. As a result, balance activities such as outdoor recreation, travel, and sports change more over the life course than core activities such as family leisure or social activities.

(Atchley & Barusch 2004, p.273)

It is not surprising that the majority of participants in this category were female, as Gilligan (1993) noted that women identify with and are judged by their standards of

responsibility and the ethic of care. The overall situation for the women was similar to what Deem and Gilroy (1998) found:

...other inactive forms of leisure may be preferred to sport, especially for women who dislike being told that they should do something because 'it is 'good for them'. The dislike of the way in which sport is often promoted, when added to the kinds of household negotiations which women not living alone must engage in if they are to participate in physical activity, women's concerns about acquiring muscles, and the limited range of physical activities which men think of as acceptably 'feminine' pursuits for women who are sexually active, makes it unsurprising that a lot of women keep well away from any kind of physical activity.

(Deem & Gilroy, p.102).

However, my findings suggest that some felt they were constrained from participating because of the need to look after others and/or work, whilst others felt that these constraints could be negotiated if they really wanted to. Herridge et al. suggest that there could be a 'self-imposed restriction of...leisure activities' (2003, p.284), whilst Henderson and Ainsworth found that "...several women described their excuses, not necessarily constraints, for not exercising" (2000, p.318). Also Gilroy's research (in Deem & Gilroy), on women's sport and physical activity experiences found that sometimes non-participation is because of '...sheer dislike of certain kinds or all kinds of sport' (1998, p.102), rather than other factors. Therefore I would assert that the guilt experienced by my participants was linked to their view that participation was within their control or should be within their control. After all as Wilson says to feel guilt "I must be to blame for it, it must be possible for me to have acted otherwise or to be otherwise disposed..." (2001, p.72).

On one side the lack of, or low, participation may be the result of a lack of time, and conflict with other role expectations; it may be because an individual does not value the activity; or maybe because they do not personally like the activity. As Leith and Shaw say:

Perhaps the guilt or laziness the women expressed was a reflection of the conflict between not really *wanting* to participate (because of feelings about physical activity and constraints from activity) but feeling one *should* participate (because of social pressure to be active and awareness of health benefits).

(Leith & Shaw, 1997, p.357)

Running through this was the idea of personal responsibility and, even though they may not be in control of their participation or may have chosen to disengage, many appeared to feel conflicted about their non-participation.

The participation appeared to be about choices and priorities, with participants suggesting that even if they could make more time, they would not all value the activity enough to do it or perhaps would still feel guilty about neglecting other responsibilities. This is the same as the findings of Bedini and Phoenix (1999a) who noted that carers of older adults when offered respite opportunities still used these to complete chores and errands, rather than for leisure. They suggested that either the carers still had work to complete or they felt guilt when taking any leisure. Similarly Henderson and Bialeschki found that the participants in their study "...generally did not perceive a lack of entitlement to leisure but did perceive a lack of priority or personal opportunity for leisure" (1991, p.62).

Overall, participants in this category had little participation, or it was much reduced from previous levels, "They tended to exhibit a certain 'all or nothing' approach to physical activity, competing with their former selves as well as with others" (Scott-Porter, 2002, p.38). In contrast other participants viewed particular types of activity involvement as most appropriate in midlife and I consider this next.

6.5.2 Participate in just sufficient and the right type of activity, for the right reasons

A second response was apparent, individuals who participated in 'sufficient activity'. This was an extension on the sub-theme of finding balance, between family and work roles, and exercise, and between taking care of self and others. The notion of an ideal balance was expressed through comments about participating just enough, for the right reasons and in the right type of activity. This is exemplified in the following quotes:

...I sort of need to be doing, even if it's just a little bit, just to be doing. I mean that's really why I don't mind walking if I can...because although I'm not doing anything, when I'm walking I'm getting a little bit of exercise... Just basically keep yourself healthy I think, you know, so you don't like put on too much weight and just like look after yourself...

(Clare)

...the lifestyle I've got now, with the car. I don't walk anywhere, unless I go specifically out for a walk. It's because of where we live really, because there's not many places...I think housework keeps you fit as well. So I've got that, but I do think about keeping fit...If I would have more time I would, if I could justify it in my mind I would go to the gym, 2 or 3 times a week. I would quite like to do that.

(Heather)

...I think in my leisure time I would rather be out doing something like cycling or walking, rather than just sitting down and reading a book...I would rather be doing a sport...rather than doing nothing. Because you realise the importance of keeping yourself fit, not just sitting around. And it's also to give you a feeling of well-being by doing sport...

(Jane)

The comments above show that these participants valued completing some physical activity, preferably fitness or individual recreation activities, for health benefits. As I have explored, by this age sport was seen as largely irrelevant by some, but being active and healthy was viewed as important to their sense of self. Most described themselves as 'active' and some as 'fit' and this was partly because the process of exercising and keeping fit had become so important. Commonly, they refer to activities which would have an impact on fitness or a vigorous effect on the body, and Kate's comments on page 216 also particularly illustrate this 'Keeping fit' was clearly important to them and was consistent with their sense of self and compatible with their desire to reproduce existing social norms. As a means to achieve this fitness, health and fitness related activity was deemed to be the ideal. This can be interpreted in terms of the dominant critique of exercise as being about health, body objectification and mind mastery (Fullagar, 2003). Being active in body shaping activities, and the outcome of body signs, represents to others 'health, wealth and social status of a person' (Burrows & Wright, 2004, p.193). There is little comment about the stimulation or enjoyment from activity and instead a link is drawn to the importance of exercise as a corporeal health related behaviour and a duty to exercise (Fullagar, 2003), which can be drawn from other activity such as walking to work. They justify in health related terms why this is needed for health and fitness, and this is supported by previous research which showed that participants exercised for body image improvement reasons, rather than enjoyment, body optimisation or stress relief (Currie, 2004).

Like the non or low participants these women, including those quoted above mention being 'active' through domestic and family activities. Thomsson found that women completed 'feminine activities' (1999, p.44) which often require a great deal of physical effort but fit with their construction of 'womanhood' (p.45). For example Jane dislikes the idea of 'sitting around' and Heather says that she receives a fitness benefit through housework. However, Heather still worries about her level of participation in planned gym activity, outside of the house and her concern is typical of the other female participants who commented on the strenuous nature of family and domestic activity, but still felt that they needed to complete additional exercise. Despite the relevance and acceptability in their mind of the physical activity from domestic work, they still felt guilt over their levels of planned physical activity. Emma also illustrates this point when she considers walking to work, "...it's really for fitness. I feel like I'm being lazy and I really ought to do someat [*sic*]",. having already talked about the strenuous nature of her house work, but she still feels concerned that she needs to be doing more real health and fitness activity, like her regular swimming (see comments on page 207).

Therefore within the conflictual feelings over sport and physical activity there was a set of perceptions about the right way to fulfil health related exercise needs. Certain activities were given the greatest legitimacy, as discussed in chapter 4. Health and fitness related exercise was seen to have greatest importance. Sport was considered to be less appropriate, at this age, and by mothers in particular. Being active in daily life, through domestic and paid work, and walking, which several of the participants were, was deemed to be less important. This shows that the physical activity as an off shoot of other activities, was described as a compensatory activity, when considered against inactivity in planned physical activity. There was evidence of a rigid hierarchy, with participants holding an idealised view that they should do some independent planned exercise, rather than only be active in other areas of life or family sport. In this way there was a sense that there was only one right way to be involved in physical activity at this age, and the others were second best. The other non-planned physical activity was seen as an activity of lesser value in meeting physical activity needs, rather than as different and equal. At the same time sport participation still had some social value at this stage, and at times participants suggested it had greatest value, based on the remnants of performance orientation

views of sport, this is not surprising considering that a competitive and performance focus, still dominates the cultural understanding of sport and "...whilst there are alternative ways of making sense of participatory behaviours, these are largely recessive within our culture" (Lake, 1998, p.130).

The sense of entitlement to health benefiting exercise may limit the type of physical activity participated in. In support, Shannon and Shaw (2005) found in their study of women with breast cancer experiences that women limited themselves to health promoting physical activities because they used health as a way to justify their participation and alleviate guilt. In this way participating in the right type of activity, for the right reasons has been evident in previous research. Featherstone et al. made the following comment about jogging:

Apart from reducing the risk of coronary heart disease, it is claimed jogging helps to cure impotency, increase confidence, psychological well-being, and puts 'you in control of your body'. Jogging has also been claimed to result in prolonged cosmetic benefits – improving posture, reducing stomach sag, helping to burn off excessive fat (Hepworth and Featherstone 1982, p.107). The notion of running for running's own sake, purposiveness without a purpose, a sensuous experience in harmony with embodied and physical nature, is completely submerged amidst the welter of benefits called up by the market and health experts (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1982).

(Featherstone et al, 1991, p.185-186)

My findings and Featherstone's comments illustrate that physical activity for health and leisure may not be the same and this is supported by others (Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Fullagar, 2003; Kleiber, 2000; Thomsson, 1999). Whilst competitive and performance activity may be culturally dominant, by midlife the focus is on the intensity of physical activity, rather than competitive or pleasurable elements (Kleiber, 2000). The personal meaning and value of this health related exercise is reinforced because of the fit with societal values (Wiley et al, 2000). As Thomsson said about the women in her study:

This "exercise-is-good-for-health-discourse" provided them all with a position in reproducing of existing norms. Exercise was seen as health-related behaviour rather than as a sport or stimulating leisure activity. The tendency was to talk about exercise in relation to its effects rather than as an interesting activity that they really wanted to do"

(Thomsson, 1999, p.44)

Therefore the health and fitness activity was often seen as enhancing health, rather than as leisure (Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Shaw, 1996; Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Willming & Gibson, 2000). These participants were distancing themselves from leisure, associated with 'enjoyment and relaxation' and embracing health and fitness activity associated with 'restrictions, sacrifices and surveillance' (Deem & Gilroy, 1998, p.93). There was a view of entitlement to take part in some health and fitness related activity, because of social endorsement, and this is similar to the example given by Bedini and Phoenix (1999a) who found that social workers could influence exercise participation among carers. The social worker noted "It is like the doctor has to tell them you know this is good for you...so then they go and exercise, but not before then." (Bedini & Phoenix, 1999a, p.230). Likewise some of my participants were focused on participating in physical activity for health benefit, not for the activity's own sake (Deem & Gilroy, 1998), not out of choice but as a purposeful activity, and this is the antithesis to participating in sport as a leisure activity. It does not fit '...traditional definitions of leisure as freedom or choice and intrinsically motivated activity' (Shaw & Dawson, 2001, p.230).

Overall, the participation in health and fitness related activity was about, the question of "...women successfully balancing all of the roles that they are expected to fulfil?" Willming and Gibson (2000, p.122). This might be explained with reference to Gilligan's (1993) call for the balance in life, in caring for self and others, in an expanded moral perspective. However, although participation in health and fitness activity might be about taking care of self, it is also about meeting moral demands for body control. It may be that the ethic of care does not prevent all participation, but whilst it may enable exercise as taking responsibility for self, it does not support an entitlement to enjoyment and in this way "...it may prevent a full experiencing of leisure" (Henderson & Allen, 1991, p.101). The notion of balance in my participants' view may not be about self-enjoyment which is what Gilligan (1993) was proposing in self care, but is often deemed to be concern for self responsibility, discipline and control. There were some contradictions with participants who started off saying that sport and physical activity should be something you enjoy, but then saying that it is all about the importance of exercise. This was also about the right way to be involved in physical activity at this age, as one commented "I see it as exercise now rather than sport". The participants had stepped aside from recreation or sport and now

focused on health and fitness related exercise. This is indicative of lifestyle options for 'deployment of the body' (Giddens, 1992, p.178) and can be viewed as a self-identity decision.

6.5.3 Participation in sport and physical activity

As with the non-participants, the personal voice of the participants came to the fore but in this case it justified the value of sport and physical activity participation, by personal experience. However, whilst meeting the social expectations to participate in a health and fitness promoting activity there were pulls in other directions; this was sport, rather than exercise and there were concerns over age appropriate behaviour, and the participants also tried to find a balance with the rest of their life. In all cases whilst they talked about personal enjoyment of sport there was a great deal of emphasis on the health related benefits they received from their current participation. I would assert that perhaps this was deemed to be more socially acceptable than enjoying sport and exercise. It should be noted that most of the individuals in this case were male.

The participants' experiences of a move into midlife and their continued participation showed elements of the dominant experience identified by Partington et al (2005) 'Age is a state of mind' (p.90). As these authors say 'At the heart of this story is battle, the belief that the ageing process can be beaten or at least postponed via physical effort and determination' (p.91) My findings showed that some participants felt that the ageing process could be controlled through physical activity and they could go on competing and improving for some time. This positive ageing is aided by a feeling of rejuvenation. 'Life begins at forty' was identified as a counter-narrative by Partington et al. but for my participants, rejuvenation compliments the idea that physical ageing need not result in a decline in participation. As I explored earlier several had moved into veteran or masters level competition, therefore providing a 'new arena' to progress in. In this way they become one of the youngest again and this can be seen with Phil, Keith, Andy, John and their positive experiences of getting older in sport participation. Phoenix and Sparkes (2007) suggest that an athlete who moves into veteran sport has a 'reluctant self', but in fact my participants felt pride in their continued achievement. Partington et al. comment that some people

side step the ageing process by changing the context of their participation, rather than stopping it, they “negate/redefine” the ageing process’ (p.94). This is also supported by Levinson et al.’s (1978) findings on the increasing awareness of a young/old polarity at midlife. “We feel old in that a phase in our lives is coming to an end and must be permitted to pass. Yet we also feel young, since the potential for a new period carries with it the qualities of rejuvenation and growth” (p.210). Some did talk about getting older, but suggested that there was no reason why their participation should not continue. They were no longer young, but not quite old (Levinson et al. 1978).

Some of the participants were surprised by the amount and level of their participation as they approached middle age, and looked back to suggest that they had not expected it to be as it is. However, whilst they believed that the physical decline, associated with ageing need not result in a reduction in participation, there were concerns about age appropriate behaviour and the clash with the roles associated with this life stage. The participants were left in a position where they tried to achieve an ideal balance between their actions, as they tried to deal with conflictual feelings about their participation. The idealised notion involved participating in sport and physical activity, but still being able to fulfil their family and work roles and responsibilities. This involved negotiation. For example Andy, would iron the family laundry on a Saturday afternoon, as a compensation for playing football in the morning, whilst John looked after his children at weekends and so participated during the week. However, some noted that they contributed to family life by developing and encouraging their children’s sport activity, as Andy said:

Sunday morning it’s my youngest son’s Rugby and Sunday afternoon it’s my middle son’s football and I’ll then watch the premier league game on the Sunday evening and its wall to wall sport all weekend....

(Andy)

Therefore they still managed to maintain involvement in sport, even whilst reducing their participation.

None the less, several noted how finding this balance had become increasingly difficult in recent times and worried that they participated too much and neglected their other roles. Phil’s comments (on p.213) provide a useful illustration of these

conflictual feelings and he went onto talk further about the current importance of his activity participation:

I would like to think I wouldn't make it any more important. I think that you can get too obsessive with things, they can become too much of a habit to the neglect of other things in your life. I think you have got to have a balance there and I do admit that at times I have had difficulty finding that balance and I am very conscious of that, as I look to the future I would like to think that you know I would keep that in mind.

(Phil)

For these particular individuals the social cost of participation was less time with family and/or partner. Some felt they needed to justify and explain their participation to others, as they felt guilty when they talked of sacrificing family time. Keith for example talked about the way other people might view his considerable participation in football, running and gym workouts, when he says:

I mean I don't see it as a negative thing myself, but I think for some people it can have negative connotations, you know you're either sporty or you're not sporty...

(Keith)

He went onto explain how he had learnt to switch off from sport so that it did not affect his family life:

Sometimes I feel it's slightly immature but just the power that sport has to influence my feelings and my mood. I mean with [*my wife and daughter*] I sort of learnt to step out of it and not let it dictate altogether but it can sort of influence my feelings and I'm quite conscious of that.

(Keith)

This suggests some pressure to distance self from the sport role (Goffman, 1971, 1972a), suggesting that intense and emotional sport involvement has become less socially appropriate. There were suggestions that the individuals had re-evaluated their participation in recent times, thinking about the impact of their involvement in sport on other areas of their life (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Some had moved into a period of slight disorientation as they contemplated reducing their sport participation and the emotional upset this would cause them. They spoke of the importance of other aspects of their lives, for example Keith described how he would have enough to fall back on, if he could not participate and this illustrated the importance of having a '...mature and well-rounded self-identity' (Lavelle & Robinson, 2007; p.3) or a 'multi-dimensional, self-concept' (Horton & Mack, 2000; p.103), with a good base to their identity in other areas of life such as work and family. However, all of

the committed sports participants appeared to have difficulties with accepting a different view of sport, as perhaps encompassing less time, and physically, demanding activities, because their view of sport was centred on the aspects they had valued earlier in life. There is continuity to the sense of sports meaning in their accounts. This gradual disorientation reflects the view of Giddens (1992, p.148/9) on the disembedding mechanisms of transitions, suggesting that identity may not change immediately, but the supports on which that particular identity was based are removed

The participants were involved in active management of continued participation, ensuring they balanced this with other commitments and could therefore justify their participation. Overall, this can be interpreted as resistance to the ethic of care, but for the men there is more legitimacy to being able to participate in sport anyway (McKay et al, 2000). Sport and physical activity offer the possibility for self care, but the involvement of these participants in sport and recreation can be defined as experiential and pleasure enhancing, rather than exercise as moral behaviour in itself. Some referred to the importance of taking care of their body because this is expected, but they still felt they could openly discuss the gaining of enjoyment and leisure from sport and physical activity. Henderson and Ainsworth drawing on Gilligan's ethic of care suggest:

The balancing of work, leisure, and significant relationships with self and others seems to be a goal of how the ethic of care can empower women and men.
(Henderson & Ainsworth 1991, p.107)

It was clear that these participants looked to a continued involvement in their current sport participation into middle age. They had already specialised by reducing the number of activities participated in (Atchley & Barausch, 2004, McPherson, 1984). The motivation of continuity continued into midlife for these participants, as Atchley and Barausch note:

By middle age, most adults have selected an array of activities and roles on which they are willing to stake their identity. Once activities become part of an identity, then motivation for continuity in activities can be expected to increase and remain high.

(Atchley & Barausch 2004, p.274)

6.5.4 Summary of conflicting feelings about sport and physical activity

Overall, conflicting feelings were apparent for all the participants who had a sense of being socially pulled into and out of sport and physical activity. There was a pressure to achieve an ideal balance between physical activity and the fulfilment of responsibilities to others, although most acknowledged they did not all achieve this. The conflicting feelings were stronger for the female participants and this is backed by previous research on women, albeit younger adults by Leith and Shaw who found that "...women experienced conflict over the opposing pressure of constraints from and constraints into participation" (1997, p.339). This has been explored previously as the pressure of the ethic of care (Henderson & Allen, 1991) and other research has touched on the double bind of feeling pressure to take care of others first and foremost, but also maintain through disciplined behaviour a healthy or healthy looking body (Markula, 1995). Commonly this work has focused on women, but it is interesting to note that this tension also applied to several of the men in my study, although the pull was less intense in either direction and Scott-Porter's (2002) work with middle aged men supports this. This dual tension could be understood in traditional and post-traditional senses of identity, as participants felt the compulsion of traditional social roles, but also lifestyle and body concerns (Giddens, 1992).

As I have explained the interviewees current participation could be categorised by non or low amounts of participation, participation in health and fitness related exercise, and continued sport and physical activity participation. Within this participants dealt with conflicting feelings about their participation. Among the first group some suggested that they accepted their lot now, even if some looked back with regret, and this was labelled as 'defeatism' by Scott-Porter in their study of middle age men (2002, p.38). Others suggested that the break from sport participation was temporary, but more recently began to fear that they would be too unfit or old to return to activity. Thomsson (1999) also found that females who had older, more independent children did not return to activity because by that point they considered it to be age inappropriate and also they began to have other dependents, such as ageing parents. A few found that they were now mainly involved in family sport activity only, intermeshing their role identities. Those who continued to participate did so quite close to the same level or more than they used to, but most

made adaptations. Some participants described how they have continued their individual participation in sport, but dropped some play and stopped their social involvement with team mates and such like, after sport activity. For some there were deliberate attempts to balance sport and family life and others noted that at times they failed to achieve a balance and their partner or family suffered.

6.6. CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this chapter indicate that the experiences of sport and physical activity in midlife are characterised by conflictual feelings. I show that there are several competing forces at play, which influence participation. Participants described encouragement or pressure to participate and on the other hand, constraints on participation. The pull to participate as my description suggests is a pressure for some, and a positive desire for others based on personal enjoyment or satisfaction. Shaw (1994) likewise argued that women may be constrained by leisure. Leith and Shaw (1997) also presented conflictual feelings, which had some similarities but these focused on young women and the inactive. The forces that I identify are not simplistic, as whilst participants are influenced by societal expectations, there are also feelings based on personal experiences. Each individual had a different sense of these feelings but there were some common aspects. Overall, participants presented a picture of the dominant feelings in their individual case and these could be grouped. For one set, mainly women, the ideals of fulfilling their role as a good parent and home maker and/or worker dominated, affecting their sense of entitlement to time for sport and physical activity. For a second set, societal health and fitness ideals dominated, but alongside the need to fulfil other relationship and role requirements. For a third set, the value of enjoyment of sport was deemed to be a legitimate ideal and this group was mainly male. This ideal is in contrast to the second group who stressed the need for exercise which maximised health and fitness benefits however, I would assert that the third group are also using this fitness ideal to justify their participation, rather than their enjoyment of sport.

My findings are stories of people mapping a different way in sport and physical activity, or a way out of sport at this life stage, with only five having continued with competitive sport. In part this is about the participants perceiving particular ideals to

be dominant such as the need to exercise or the need to fulfil other responsibilities.
As Wiley et al. comments:

The immediate social context of people's lives, as well as broader societal values and structures, may affect not only leisure-participation rates, but also the personal relevance and meanings associated with leisure.
(Wiley et al, 2000, p.29)

The ethic of care and work, care in particular, have a tremendous impact on participation at this life stage. Moral voices are clearly evident, in the way the interviewees speak about what they 'should' or 'shouldn't do' in relation to activity now, based on fitness ideals and ethic of care ideals; and this is particularly problematic for the female participants. Participants felt an obligation towards '...fostering a sense that one is 'good', a 'worthy person'...' (Giddens, 1992, p.79) and in pursuit of this many participants felt pulled in opposite directions. As Shaw et al. found finding a balance between 'work, family, and leisure' in life, is a struggle, particularly for women and yet a lack of balance can negatively impact on 'health and wellbeing' (2003, p.17).

In part, participants embraced a sense that they either should or should not participate because of ageing. Some clung to the need to 'grow old gracefully' and suggested that they were too old now, or were becoming too old, for sport and physical activity. Atchley and Barusch (2004) aptly comment that age related role changes constrict time available and at the same time some experience a sense of declining physical capacity, which act as a double constriction. However, even this group felt they should complete some exercise. Others side-stepped the concerns over ageing and suggested that their experiences of competitive sport participation were as positive as ever, with involvement in veteran and masters level sport rejuvenating their involvement and allowing another avenue for performance development. However, for some participants side-stepping ageing, involved movement into a restricted range of activities, focused on health and fitness exercise.

Overall, entering midlife proved to have constraining and motivating effects on sport and physical activity participation. Changes in the meaning and value of sport and physical activity and, being a sport participant at this particular life stage were critical. This links the findings here to those of Chapter 4 and 5 and I will provide an

overall synthesis in the final Chapter. Finally, the findings show paradoxes and ambiguities in the midlife experience of sport and physical activity, and this adds to the gap in the published research highlighted by Lewis and Ridge (2005, p.3) and Partington et al (2005, p.98).

Chapter 7

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I will restate the major findings of my study and consider the implications of this research. Then I reflect on the research process and consider whether the process has been worthwhile. Following on from this I identify further possibilities for research related to this study.

7.1 REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDY

7.1.1 Intentions of the Study

I began this study by drawing attention to the low sport and physical activity rates of the adult population in the U.K. In particular I discussed the decline in participation with increase in age and noted that midlife participation rates were low. I highlighted the ambitious plans of the U.K. Government to increase participation rates and discussed how this would need to involve increases in participation by adults of all age groups, as well as more continued participation from the current young as they age. I examined research on constraints to participation and other studies on experiences of sport, but noted that these have more often focused on committed participants, with a particular emphasis on youth and older age groups. This left a gap in the research on mid-life and in particular on the transition to mid-life.

My final research question was ‘Can we explain patterns and developments of current participation in sport and physical activity by examining the development of an individual’s perceptions of the activity and sense of sporting identity over their lives?’ I had the following secondary research questions:

- 1.) To evaluate historical and current sport participation experiences and senses of sport self-identity in adult life, through individuals’ sport histories.
- 2.) To identify development of the individuals’ meanings of sport.

- 3.) To evaluate the long-term impact of the perception of youth sports experience on later sport participation and identity, development.
- 4.) To consider structural, cultural and ideological impacts on sport participation.
- 5.) To consider the impact of life stages, transitions and events on participation and as 'turning points' in the construction/reconstruction of sport identity in adult life.

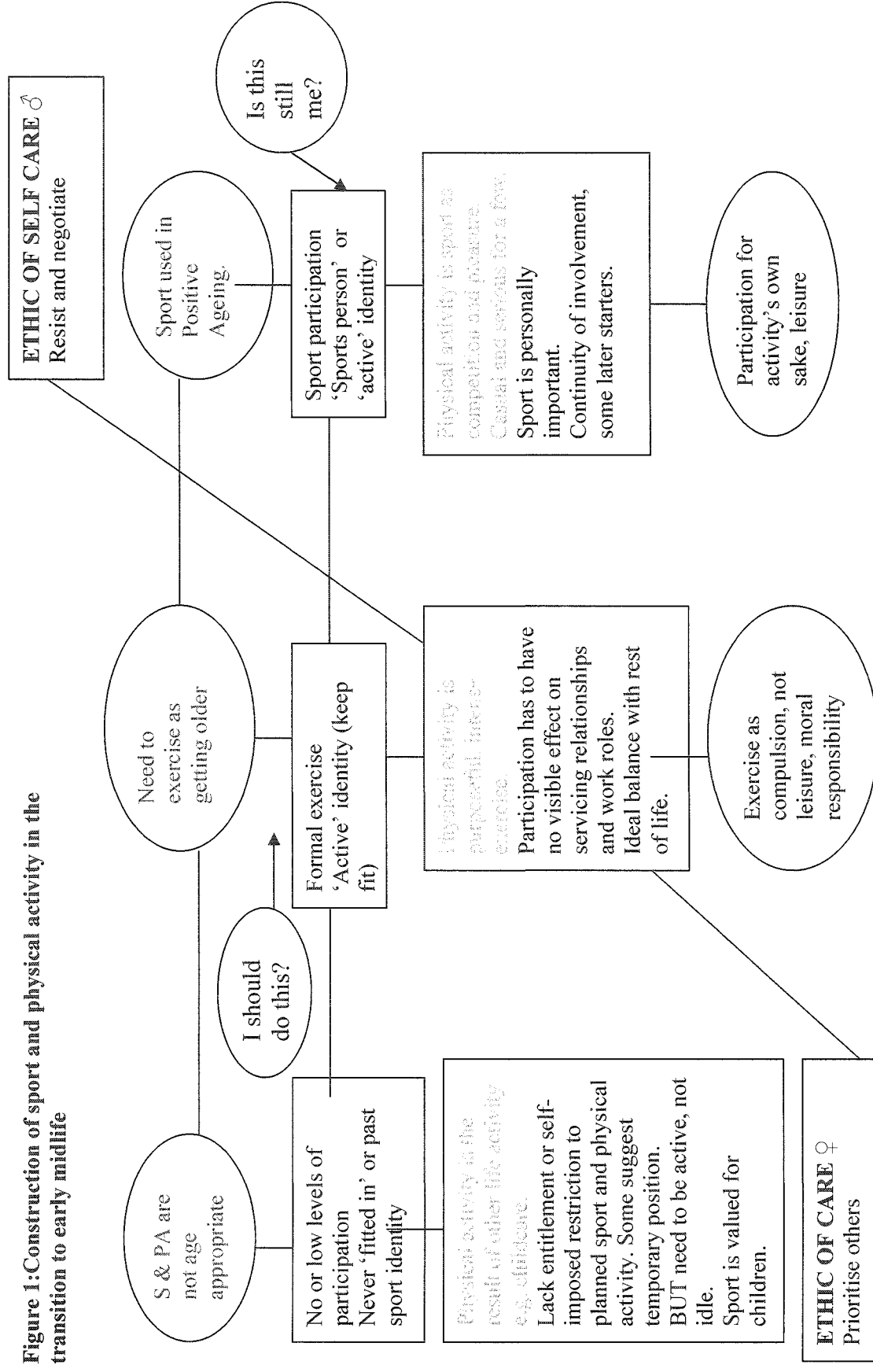
In sum the aim of this thesis was to explore what sport, physical activity and participation meant to a group of people entering midlife. Given that midlife can be seen as a time of life transition, and possibly one of turbulence and crisis, young and old polarities and concerns about the body may be quite relevant to sport and physical activity. In particular, I sought to contribute an in depth study, to move beyond survey work completed with this age group. In order to explore these issues I carried out a qualitative study examining the sport and physical activity experiences and feelings of UK individuals, entering midlife, between the ages 38-43 years.

7.1.2 Key findings

The major theme identified in this study was the construction of sport and sport participation, understood as it relates to the participants' lives as a whole. The sub-themes through which the participants constructed sport and physical activity related to: meaning and values, the sources of these, and changes in these across the life course; self-definition in relation to sport and physical activity, changes in relation to the life course (particularly the transition to midlife) and the impact of the ageing process and relationships. These themes interacted with one another and were tied together by the concepts of identity management (explored in chapter 5 in particular), role theory (Kelly, 1983; Turner, 1956, 1978; Zurcher, 1970, 1979), life course (Kelly, 1983), life cycle (Levinson et al, 1978, 1996), family life cycle (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975) (introduced in chapter 5 and discussed further in chapter 6), and entitlement (Henderson, 1991, Henderson & Allen, 1991, Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991, Herridge et al, 2003) (discussed in chapter 6) in relation to sport, physical activity and health. In addition to help me interpret the findings of this study I drew on several theoretical perspectives: structuration (Giddens, 1979, 1984), dramaturgical (Goffman, 1971) and relational (Gilligan, 1993) theories. Figure 1

shows a grounded theory model of how these themes are related, showing a relationship between the participants' midlife participation; constructions of sport and physical activity, particularly health and fitness related activity; and their experience of ageing and role conflict. It also shows that the participants' understanding of sport and physical activity in relation to leisure, coincided with a spectrum from ethic of care to ethic of self care (Gilligan, 1993).

Figure 1: Construction of sport and physical activity in the transition to early midlife



The starting point of my research was to consider the meaning of sport to the participants in **Chapter 4**. I showed a diversity of experience and meaning, but the participants in my study drew in particular on early experiences of school sport, thereby understanding sport as organised, competitive, physical and exertive, and achievement focused activity. Only a few had wider understandings of sport, and this demonstrated a limited and traditional definition of sport, as those who considered wider definitions usually fell back on their sense of society's legitimate definition. Despite participation in a wider range of team and individual sports, both competitive and recreational, and health and fitness activities, these were not all included in the definitions they held of what is 'really sport', instead they often referred to participation, in these other activities, as being active.

Whilst there were common definitions of sport and physical activity, the participants varied on whether they liked or disliked the activity commonly linking this to early experiences, and with some qualifying enjoyment of sport to particular contexts and purposes of participation. There was also variation over whether they considered sport and physical activity to be leisure and whilst all felt it should be a leisure experience, not all understood sport in this way. All the participants defined sport as a worthwhile activity, referring to cultural constructions of positive benefits, yet other study findings showed that the activity was not personally worthwhile to all of them, at the mid-life stage. The data on social and personal meaning were contradictory, with some suggesting that sport was an activity of value, but not for them. These tensions were exemplified by stories of exclusionary incidents and competency concerns in Chapter 5.

It was further demonstrated in **Chapter 5** that the meaning of sport influenced decision making on sport participation, being entwined with the relevance of the activity to the individual and the significance of participation to their sense of self-identity. A mainstream ideology about sportspersons was evident (Coakley, 2003), centring on this person being young, male, competitive, physically skilled, fit, serious about participation, with sport taking a central place in their life. Whilst some participants viewed this as a desirable identity, others did not. Some participants fitted with all or parts of this ideology and defined sport as a central part of their identity, some participated in sport but did not have a strong identification with it,

others considered themselves to be active, and others still had elements of personal identification with sport, but sometimes felt they did not 'fit in'. Some had a sense of themselves as 'active' or as a sport participant, but not as a sporty or sports person, or athlete. This suggests some resistance to the narrowly prescribed notion of the sports person, but whilst an 'active' identity based on participation was seen as an alternative, it was frequently marginalised by the individuals, as second best or 'not really sport' so there was little sense of challenge to the dominant sport group. This perhaps reflects the dominance of competitive team sport discourses, with a position outside this more socially acceptable than a challenge to the sense of what sport can be. Positioning oneself outside the dominant interpretation of the sport person, also avoided comparison to the expected sport persons performance and attributes (Goffman, 1952). The participants had been concerned by impression management, with their desire to be accepted by peers. Whilst being active can encompass sport participation, it avoids the performance orientation associated with self-definition as a sports person. This was evidence of 'hedging' on the fringes of sport (Goffman, 1952).

Participation depended on whether the sense of sport identity offered an opportunity for successful performance, with competency and impression management key concerns. It was heartening that some who felt excluded from sport earlier in life, later found sports that suited them and supportive contexts to participate in. Feeling 'part of sport' and continuing with activity depended on being able to meet the norms of behaviour, training, staying fit, being technically competent, and other traits such as being young (Goffman, 1971; Giddens, 1984, 1992). Whether sport remained attractive to the overall self identity, and as a result sport participation, varied across life stages and also as a result of role conflict and relationships. Participants who had been successful sport performers, during their lifetime tended to demonstrate a continuity of involvement with this trajectory forming the basis of their identity (Atchley, 1989, 2004; Giddens, 1992). They wished to maintain their identity and this was negotiated around other roles. The position of sport within the identity varied, for some it was central, and for others temporary or peripheral. For most participants their participation had reduced as they moved into and through adult life, with questions over its purpose as 'reflexive mobilising of self-identity' (Giddens, 1992, p.33) and a case of prioritisation at times of role overload. For some of those

heavily involved in sport, only recently had their move into establishing family life, the intensifying of work commitments and a growing questioning of age appropriateness led them to consider conflict with their sport identity. This highlighted some of the issues at the heart of the entry into midlife.

Although the impact of various life transitions on participation was evident, I focused on the move into midlife as focal to this study and as the participants spoke more about this, as their current experience. Therefore **Chapter 6** considered the experiences of sport participation as the interviewees entered midlife. This experience was characterised by conflictual feelings and changes in the appropriateness of the activity mooring of identity. At this mid-life transition stage their participation experience was characterised by low levels or no participation; participation in just sufficient and the right type, for the right reasons; and participation, in sport and physical activity (see figure 1). Some participants felt a social pressure to reduce their sport participation as they got older and a number felt that sport was an appropriate activity for the young, not for them. There was a general view that sport was seen as 'childish' and that it was the norm to expect reduced participation by this life stage. Some of the more active sport participants had reduced their day-to-day participation because of this moral impetus, whilst others continued to participate but felt guilt. There were suggestions that anyone who has a high degree of commitment to sport activity is to some extent seen as selfish. However, whilst sport identity was considered to be problematic, identity based on health and fitness activity was widely accepted.

With this distinction between sport and health and fitness activity, the ideological, political and social context of sport participation became evident through the participants' interpretations of normative conceptions of which forms of sport and exercise participation should be considered appropriate. The dominance of cultural understandings of competitive and youth focused sport and participation had formed the 'essence of sport' (Sippel, 2006) for the participants across their lifetimes. However, increasingly as they moved into midlife there was a sense of decreasing cultural value for sport and a focus on appropriate physical activity as individual fitness and exercise. The participants' interpretation of cultural values often placed sport and exercise within a wider healthy lifestyle. The notion of appropriate activity

was also linked to an increasing sense of the relevance and need for health enhancing activity with ageing. Participants seemed to find it harder to ignore moral voices suggesting they should exercise for health benefits, when their personal experiences of negative health effects of non-exercise gave added resonance to this. Moral voices could be heard, in which participants suggested what activity participation they 'should' be involved in now. There was a sense that individuals' who did not want to participate, felt increasingly guilty about their non-participation and felt that social pressures to 'do something about it' were becoming harder to ignore.

At the same time several were accepting a conflicting orthodoxy that they were becoming too old for sport, and whilst many still participated, they did so for health and fitness reasons or participated in health and fitness activities only. The position of sport and physical activity in self-identity was related to this changing cultural status. My study participants felt they could either embrace competitive sport as challenging expectations about continued involvement that start at this age or they must move into a health and fitness domain or justify their recreational sport with a health and fitness slant. So as they entered the midlife stage there was some evidence of resistance to the age discrimination of traditional sporting practice and to the notion of what sport should be, however largely the participants conformed to the sense of what sport should be about at this age, for health and fitness.

At the same time physical activity participation and fulfilling the cultural norms of adult life, with its inherent responsibilities for others, were seen to an extent to be mutually exclusive, however this was more a concern about competitive and leisure based sport. Participants still felt a pressure to participate in health enhancing physical activity, but they also felt pressure to fulfil their role as a carer and provider, which affected their entitlement to time for themselves. They had interpreted normative representations of established adults, career persons, parents and mothers in particular and morally compared themselves to this, which restricted their catering for their own needs. A number of individuals with low participation rates used this argument to justify their participation level. Whilst some suggested they were constrained by role conflict, there were others who appeared to impose a self-restriction on activity because of low preference for the activity. In some cases this was linked to low skill and knowledge base, and pressure to complete physically

hard exercise for maximum body benefit. So the need to put other roles and responsibilities first was accepted by some, embraced by those who did not personally enjoy their experiences of activity, and negotiated with a sense of regret by others.

The findings therefore demonstrated that participants were pulled in different and sometimes opposing directions, by moral directives. It was clear that most participants felt morally responsible for their behaviour related to sport and physical activity. The desirability of achieving ideal balance in life, between providing for others and fulfilling work responsibilities and exercising was generally accepted, and this exhibited the midlife and gendered nature of their lives. The individual's participation decisions depended on the voice that was the loudest; the social or personal.

Many participants commented that they were striving for the ideal balance.

This often imposed a constraint on their lives, with the practical problems they experienced while trying to achieve this balance and also with issues of personal motivation. Therefore their negotiation of midlife reinforces the view that the establishment period leaves little time for participation, in all areas the ethic of care, and the meaning and restrictions of midlife were evident. Some managed to ignore the social pressure to exercise by emphasising the moral deficit in those who participated and neglected other responsibilities. In addition, some participants seemed to be able to resist moral pressures respectively about non-participation or participation by acting more on their personal feelings. The participants varied as to their resistance, with some discursive consciousness as reflexive agents (Giddens, 1992) of the unrealistic nature of pressures to exercise, particularly among the women and some challenges to the age expectations related to sport and exercise. Overall, the satisfaction with current sport and physical activity varied as some felt tension, either guilt about their participation or non-participation or desire to participate more, but some seemed to feel comfortable with the balance they had achieved, as this comment from John illustrates:

I do enjoy and I feel as if I should regularly exercise. I think that the fact that I do regularly exercise is good for me. I know I should do more, but I enjoy what I do.
(John)

Therefore the conflictual feelings about sport and physical activity participation demonstrate the power of social structure to influence behaviour. The two significant constraints identified at the mid-life stage; entitlement to sport and physical activity as a result of traditional roles, particularly mothering, and cultural scripts regarding health and appropriate participation were evidence of legitimisation structures determining moral rules of behaviour and expectations of roles (Giddens, 1979, p.82). These pulled participants in several directions, both into health and fitness exercise and out of sport, and most influential of all into their midlife establishment roles, to the detriment of participation. There is a sense of the traditional and post modern about the conflicts surrounding self in relation to sport and physical activity at this life stage. The participants still have 'traditional moorings' (Tucker, 1998, p.125) for identity, living lives in relation to each other and being greatly influenced by an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1993). Whilst this applied to men, as well as women, the findings showed that whilst gender roles within the family had changed, it was still women on the whole who gave up being physically active for the sake of their children. The self identity related to sport was clearly a construction of social interaction with peers, family and society (Giddens, 1987; Kelly, 1983; Levinson et al, 1978, 1996; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975).

However, alongside the traditional identity bases sit post traditional understandings of identity management, of a variety of identity choices, where maintaining a coherent sense of self becomes difficult (Giddens, 1992). Linked to this, Giddens comments on the significance of leisure and lifestyle choices in identity construction and continuity. The individual's need to deploy the body in a fight against the ageing process is recognised as an adaptive strategy of continuity. The rule that physical activity should be used for health, sanctions this as morally appropriate and acts as a powerful control over behaviour. Where the study participants conformed to the need to fight the ageing process, because society values the young, rather than older body, social control was evident. The participants still needed to manage their performance to gain this identity confirmation and Dionigi (2004) uses the concept of masking age, describing being active as wearing the mask of a younger person. With this focus, when sport and physical activity become primarily about health, they lose any instrumental nature (Giddens, 1964).

The findings were indicative of the desirability of life balance at this life stage between family, work, sport and physical activity. The participants also talked about the difficulties of achieving such a balance. Gilligan referred to this as the need for principled morality, to move from an orientation of responsibility for others, to a 'post-conventional morality' of taking responsibility and caring for self, as well as others (1993, p.99). She talked about the need to take care of individual interests, but even when the study participants talked about time for their own needs, a closer look revealed that they were concerned because of weight management and fitness concerns, therefore meeting other social moral imperatives, rather than their own needs of well-being. In fact the most relevant physical activity at this stage for some participants, was the result of domestic work and therefore an extension of the ethic of care.

Giddens' understanding that "The capability of adopting freely chosen lifestyles, a fundamental benefit generated by a post traditional order, stands in tension, not only with barriers to emancipation, but with a variety of moral dilemmas" (1992, p.231) was useful for understanding such conflictual feelings in this study. A variety of moral dilemmas are evident; role and relationship conflict, self-entitlement to time, triviality of particular types of sport – competitive and leisure, competence in the role for example, and these can be understood as concerns with ontological security (Giddens, 1984), impression management (Goffman, 1971) and ethics of moral behaviour (Gilligan, 1993). However, Giddens has been criticised for failing to acknowledge sufficiently the practical restrictions on people and how culture shapes experiences. I therefore turned to role theory (Kelly, 1983; Turner, 1956, 1978; Zurcher, 1970, 1979), and healthism (Crawford, 1980) to understand the social expectations and conflictual position the individuals found themselves in.

The moral dilemmas which were centred on identity concerns varied across life stages and Giddens (1992) refers to life events as possible transition points. The participants made choices about sport and physical activity, depending on the compatibility with their life context or needs, and their self-perception (Bernard, 1988). In particular it appears that the mid-life transition may occur at a time when reflection on the appropriateness of continued sport participation is occurring for the

committed and the moral necessity of exercise is heightened for all. For my participants identity management has occurred in recent years and continues to, with concerns about sport and physical activity. Therefore the changes in the meaning and construction of sport and physical activity are an inherent part of the mid-life transition itself, linked to the role overload, health and ageing concerns, which occur at this stage.

7.1.3 Reflections on the research process

The research process contributed empirically to an understanding of sport participation, led by the participants' perspectives. I used an in-depth qualitative interview technique to collect data for this study and usually interviewed the participants in their own home, and I believe they were comfortable expressing their views. For data analysis, the voice centred relational reading method I used allowed for participants voices to come through and was this followed by open coding, until themes had been generated from the data. I would have liked to complete the same in-depth method of analysis for the first 6 interviews, but time did not allow for me to return to this data and complete this.¹

There were other limitations to my study as the study sample was entirely white, British and predominantly middle class by education, with most married with children. There are issues of class, ethnic background, disability and sexuality, which my study will not represent. However, I aimed only to get a group of participants who would share their experiences of sport at a particular age, because of lack of focus on midlife individuals in previous qualitative work. I did not aim for the sample to be representative, hoping only that the findings would speak to those individuals and possibly others at this life stage who had grown up in a particular socio-historical period. As the findings established the importance of relationships, responsibility for health and perceptions of physical decline I particularly acknowledge that the findings for those in lower social classes may have been very different. Likewise lifestyle, fitness concerns and sport tend to middle class values (Howell & Ingham, 2001; Ingham & McDonald, 2003) and may not be desirable for

¹ Studying part-time and working full time, the sets of readings for each interview could sometimes go on for a month at a time, as I was able to work on it intermittently only.

all ethnic and cultural groups (Wray, 2007). Further research could be to replicate the study on a wider social base. None the less, the research was useful, as it gave me a wealth of data, contributing interesting findings and it is unfortunate that only the key ones could be presented within the limits of a PhD write up.

7.2 ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE THESIS

The unique contribution of this thesis is the provision of an in-depth understanding of the issues of sport and physical activity participation at mid-life transition for a group of men and women, with a range of involvement in sport. A life history perspective was taken which is unique with this particular group. The data has been analysed with a voice centred relational reading technique (Brown and Gilligan, 1992, 1993) which to my knowledge has not been used in sport research. The findings showed the contradictions and tensions surrounding sport participation and sport identity at this life stage. The thesis also showed both positive motivations for, and more negative constraints into sport participation, and whilst several studies have looked at constraints on participation, few studies have dealt with constraints into sport and physical activity as pressures to participate (Fredrick & Shaw, 1995; Leith & Shaw, 1997; Shaw, 1994).

The theoretical contribution which this thesis makes is a multi-disciplinary one, offering therefore a unique and critical application. To understand the relationship of people to sport and physical activity required theorising at a number of levels, so in order to do this the thesis has drawn upon a range of theories from different discipline areas, in an innovative combination. There were two key lines of focus in the thesis centring on the position of sport and physical activity participation in relation to: family role conflict and strain, and the desire for life balance and discipline of self and body. Additionally an overarching and cumulative concern about both caring for others and self was noted at this early mid-life stage, which is why theories that tell us about identity management and life transitions are critical for this interpretation. Consequently a variety of theoretical approaches were important to this thesis as they complemented each other in the way they can be used to understand moral perceptions of physical activity, the body and role conflict.

Therefore in overview, whilst I used Giddens (1984, 1992) and Goffman (1971) to explore the meaning of the activity to the individual and their identity, I used Gilligan (1993) to look at the impact of relationship demands and feelings surrounding entitlement. My use of role theory (Kelly, 1983; Turner, 1956, 1978; Zurcher, 1970, 1979) was very important as I looked at the relative importance of a sport participant role and compared this to other life roles, so to determine the merger into self-identity. I then complemented this with the use of life cycle theory (Levinson et al, 1978, 1996; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975) so that I could interpret change in role importance across time. It is the latter set of theories that offered the most useful perspective in this thesis (Kelly, 1983; Levinson et al, 1978, 1996; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975; Turner, 1956, 1978; Zurcher, 1970, 1979).

Whilst this thesis can be viewed as a multi-disciplinary offering, the key theoretical contribution it makes is of the usefulness of role and life cycle theories. Gibson (2005) and with Pennington-Gray (2005) have made some head way with reminding us of the usefulness that these theories still have, through applied work on sport tourist behaviour. Meanwhile Roberts (2006) noted that Rapoport and Rapoport (1975) still offer a relevant understanding of leisure through the adoption of life cycle as the central concept. Likewise my employment of these theoretical perspectives shows their major importance to the understanding of sport participation in early mid-life.

The role theory showed the relevance of roles and activities to who the participant's are and what's important to them now. A focus on life cycle demonstrates the conflict between dominant and ephemeral roles which was particularly impactful on the females in my study, and helps highlight the role strain that is starting to show with male participants who were particularly active. The theory shows how other areas of life become more important at midlife. This perspective raises the question of whether the sport participation role gives balance to everyday life (Zurcher, 1970). At the same time it is clear that concerns about role conflict and importance are tied to issues surrounding ethic of care for others and self, and Gilligan's (1993) findings on this offer a complementary insight. Likewise concerns about the need to fight ageing and manage the body whilst interpreted as typical of the mid-life cycle, could be further understood as post-modern concerns with body management which

Giddens (1992) offers further insight into. Therefore role and lifecycle theory have proved to be the major perspectives adopted, but they are taken further by the complementary use of aspects of other theories, giving the unique perspective of this thesis.

From a practical perspective the findings showed that Physical Education was extremely influential in shaping the participants views of sport and their current relationship with sport. Linked to this the study identified that there was a dominance of competitive sport (associated with youth), but also health and fitness related exercise (associated with current midlife stage) as the valued versions of physical activity. This led to the marginalisation of other participatory forms; recreational sport and physical activity for personal pleasure and development. As media coverage and provision of sport and health focus on competition or health this looks likely to continue. Sport and health promotions have focused on a greater variety of physical activity in daily life, but the stress remains on health outcomes, rather than enjoyment aspects. For the participants there was a sense that participation in a fitness class or recreational sport was less worthy than competitive sport. Overall, I would assert that there are problems with the value placed upon a narrow conception of sport at the childhood stage and that this dominance does last a lifetime.

As a result of considering the contribution of my study I have the following thoughts on further research possibilities. As I acknowledged, my research was conducted with a small and unrepresentative sample of early midlife individuals, although the goal of this kind of study is in depth understanding, not generalisation. Further research could be conducted with a wider sample of different education backgrounds, work status, non-white, and more single people and varied family units. I also looked at early middle age and the same study could be replicated with individuals up to the 60-65 transition to consider difference across midlife. The same study could also be conducted with older age groups to consider a comparison across adult life stages and with younger participants to develop on work conducted by Phoenix and Sparkes (2007) on anticipated change in participation, in midlife.

Given the importance of the impact of the ethic of care and relationships on participation in this study, more work should be conducted to look at these aspects at

the midlife point. A study on the participation of married couples, looking at both partners' participation and their views of each other's would be useful, developing on my findings from Rachel and Keith. Other authors have looked at women's participation within a family (Thompson, 1990, 1995), mothers (Brown et al, 2001; Currie, 2004; Lewis & Ridge, 2005; Wearing, 1990) and fathers (Coakley, 2006; Kay, 2006; Such, 2006) but work on couples has been restricted to domestic life, work and leisure (Doucet, 1995; Such, 2001, 2006) so an in depth study on sport and physical activity from both sides of a relationship would be useful. Cross-cultural examination would also allow exploration of diversity in partnerships, roles and family structures and their impact. The study showed that men do experience the ethic of care and further research on this specifically with men in midlife would also develop on from Scott-Porter's (2002) findings, which were limited by a focus on inactive and ill men.

Further interpretive research is needed on midlife sport and physical activity participation, as still so much of the work produced is survey based (such as Carpenter, 1989, 1997; Thompson et al, 2002). There is little on midlife transition and another study could explore the meaning of midlife and the categorisation of transition points from the participants' perspective. A longitudinal study across midlife or at transition points might offer an interesting perspective on mid-life change or study. However, this would require frequent data collection to capture transition points. A wider study on sport, leisure, work and family with an early midlife sample, perhaps with a local focus could also explore the relationship between these aspects. Also the impact of generations on this relationship could be considered, as will the youth of today have the same experiences in relation to sport when they are in the mid-life transition?

Colleagues of mine, Partington et al. (2005) conducted a qualitative study on mid-life sport participation considering those between 35-55 years of age. They focused on individuals who were actively involved in sports, including those in sports with competition structures for older age groups. Given the data we hold collectively it might be interesting to take their data for those in early middle age and apply the VCR methods of data analysis I completed for my study, to compare the resonance of my current findings. A continuation would be to complete a further study

combining aspects of their study and mine, to make a more deliberate comparison between those involved in recreational sport, competitive sport, and health and fitness activities. The importance of the context of participation might also be explored. For example, research I previously conducted (King & Thompson, 2002) and more recently doctoral work by Jarvis (2006) suggests that gay sports clubs provide support for late entry to sport, and operationalise a sport for all ethos. A study on mid-life participants in such clubs would offer an interesting comparison.

The findings of the study have various implications for professional practice, related to youth and early midlife provision in particular. Practitioners need to consider the processes that legitimise competitive and youth focused modes of activity, as sport. This understanding was set early on for the participants in my study and resulted in a sense of exclusion for some from the youth stage onwards, but more latterly formed the basis of an understanding of sport as age inappropriate and irrelevant to the midlife stage for some. There is a need to support the developing notions of a wider understanding of sport expressed by some of my participants. It is quite likely that future generations may have a different understanding of sport, derived from their experience of a wider range of activities at school, however competitive understandings still appear to predominate (Lake, 2001). Whilst my participants may see sport as childish, exercise is valued. The compulsion to exercise can have positive health benefits, but can be seen as narrow and controlling for some. There is an emphasis on health improvement measures in promoting physical activity and sport to those in mid-life (Pheasey, 2006). However, there appears to be little emphasis on the 'fun' elements of physical activity within provision for adults. Practical work is needed on the relationship between leisure and physical activity, and the role of 'active leisure'.

Practitioners view mid-life as the over 50 or pre-retirement life stage and there is a lack of tailored provision for those in early mid-life, particularly as other provision targets youth and then adults generically. However, it is encouraging that Sport England (2007b) in their market segmentation categories², have tried to encourage a more diverse perspective, with three of the categories covering the transition period

² These were designed for practitioners to understand adult's attitudes and motivations towards sport and physical activity

into mid-life. At this stage individuals are often balancing work and family commitments and promotion needs to make a link to how sport and physical activity can support these multiple roles. This promotion message should not be morally censorial, but might focus on the opportunity for stress relief and provision of well-being.

At the start of this study I wondered 'Is sport for all?' as Hunt et al. asked in 2001. There is certainly a focus on physical activity, as being as important for those in mid-life. Practioners focus on giving the message that 'exercise is different and better than being generally active' (Pheasey, 2006). My study participants have accepted the value of 'being active', but the non-sport participants view their 'active' behaviour as second best to sport. Additionally those who are involved in 'active leisure' rather than in formal fitness activities view this as less worthy. Issues centre on how attitudes to physical activity can be altered so this it is as worthy as sport participation. It is perhaps the need to widen out the notion of positive physical activity that matters most. Ultimately though, the support of people in the transition to midlife is contingent upon practioners focusing more specifically on this age group and taking heed of the way in which they construct and make sense of sport, physical activity and midlife.

APPENDIX A: TABLES

Table 1: The most popular activities with middle aged men and women

Men 30-44 years	Women 30-44 years	Men 45-59 years	Women 45-59 years
Walking	Walking	Walking	Walking
Snooker/Pool billiards	Swimming	Cycling	Keep fit/yoga/dance
Swimming	Keep fit/yoga/dance	Snooker/Pool billiards	Swimming
Cycling	Cycling	Golf	Cycling
Soccer	Ten pin bowling/skittles	Swimming	Golf
Jogging	Snooker/Pool billiards	Keep fit/yoga/dance	Badminton
Golf	Jogging	Jogging	Horse Riding

Source: General Household Survey, 1996 (Sport England/UK Sport, 2001).

Table 3: Constraints and exclusion in sport and leisure

Group Excluded	Youth		Poor/ unemployed	Women	Older People	Ethnic Minority	People with disability/learn difficulty
	Child	Young People					
Structural factors							
Poor physical/social environment	+	+	++	+	+	++	+
Poor facilities/community capacity	+	+	++	+	+	+	++
Poor support network	+	+	++	+	+	+	++
Poor transport	++	++	++	++	++	+	+++
Mediating factors							
Managers							
policies/attitudes	+	+	++	+	+	++	++
Labelling by society	+	++	+	+	+	+++	++
Personal factors							
Lack of time structure	+	+	+++		+		+
Lack of income	+	+	+++	+	++	++	++
Lack of skills/personal social capital	+	+	+++	+	+	++	+
Fears over safety	++	++	++	+++	+++	++	++
Powerlessness	++	++	+++	++	++	+++	++
Poor self/body image	+	+	++	+	+	++	++

Note: The number of +s represents the severity of particular constraints for particular groups.

Source: Collins, 2003; Table 3.1, p.26.

Table 4: Response of personnel to interview promotion (February 2000)

Job Category/Description	Female	Female: Willing to be interviewed	Male	Male: Willing to be interviewed	Total	Total willing to be interviewed
Administration	108	18	30	10	138	28
Ancillary - Caretaking			4	1	4	1
Ancillary - Catering	4		1		5	
Ancillary - Cleaning	23	2	1		24	2
Ancillary - Couriers			6		6	
Ancillary - Crafts			3		3	
Ancillary - Grounds			2		2	
Ancillary - Security			7	1	7	1
Faculty - Technical	7	1	16	2	23	3
Models	2		1		3	
Research	6	6	9	6	15	12
Senior Management	1				1	
Teaching	123	25	107	25	230	50
Total	274	52	187	45	461	97

Source: Compiled using data from University of Northumbria Personnel Department, January 2000 and response data.

APPENDIX B

LETTER SENT TO ALL MEMBERS OF STAFF OF THE UNIVERSITY WHO WERE AGED BETWEEN 38-43 YEARS OF AGE ON 28TH JANUARY 2000

Dear Colleague,

My name is Lindsay King and I lecture in the Division of Sport Sciences. Currently I am undertaking a PhD study.

For my PhD research I am interested in talking to people between the ages of 38-43 about their experience of sport and physical activity. The Personnel Department has agreed to send this letter out to all staff between these ages, so hopefully this includes you.

Would you be interested in taking part in my study? I would like to talk to both participants and non-participants. You don't have to be interested in sport or active. The research is based on interviews lasting about 2 hours. I have already carried out some interviews as part of a pilot study and the participants have commented on how they found the experience interesting. Many enjoyed sharing their memories of sport throughout their lives.

Interviews would be arranged at a time convenient for both of us. As we would be sitting talking, I prefer to interview people in their homes if possible (this is usually quieter and more comfortable than anywhere at the University). If this isn't possible, I can arrange a convenient venue at UNN.

I will start interviewing from late January onwards and expect to be interviewing participants until September 2000. If you're interested in taking part in the study or want to find out more about the research please complete the details below. The slip can be detached from this letter and returned by internal mail, in the envelope provided. (If you don't have access to internal mail you can send the envelope, from outside the University, by free post). Alternatively, you can phone me (at the number above) or email to Lindsay.King@unn.ac.uk. Please, leave contact details if I'm not available and I will call you back.

I do hope you will feel able to participate in the study. Your assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Lindsay King
Lecturer- Division of Sport Sciences

**If you are willing to be interviewed or would like more information please
complete as many of the following details as you can.**

Please indicate your:

Name-	
Age- (This detail would be useful for choosing an interview sample)	
Job Title-	
Contact Telephone No	
Email-	
Contact Address-	
Best time/days for contacting you-	
Are you willing to be interviewed for the research project?.	Do you need further information before deciding to take part in the interview?
Yes/No	Yes/No

**DETACH THIS SECTION AND RETURN IN THE SAE PROVIDED.
PLEASE, POST THE ENVELOPE IN THE UNN INTERNAL SYSTEM
WHEREVER POSSIBLE.**

APPENDIX C

LIST OF PSEUDONYMS USED FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Andy
Ben
Clare
Craig
Emma
Heather
Jackie
Jane
John
Kate
Keith
Penny
Peter
Phil
Rachel
Rob

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction: (To be read to the participant)

I'd like to talk to you about your experiences in sport and physical activity throughout your life so far. What I'd really like to get from you is your life history in relation to those activities. When you're remembering, things for me, try to think what it meant to you at the time, what you thought and felt about it. What I'm interested in is your story.

If at anytime there are questions that you don't want to answer, then that's fine just let me know.

Introductory Questions:

- Are you interested in sport and physical activity?
- Do you do any, at the moment?
- What does the word sport mean to you?
- Would you describe yourself as sporty?

Prompt

If answers NO to main question:

How would you describe people who are sporty?

Childhood:

Let me talk to you about childhood, say the period of your life whilst you were at school.

Introductory Questions:

- Would you say you were sporty as a child?

If answers NO to main question:

What were the children who did sport like?

- How would you have described sport?
 - Would you say your friends/family were sporty when you were a child?

Open Questions: (includes opportunity for non-school sport to be examined. Prompts for school and non-school sport could be used)

- What memories of sport and physical activity do you have from childhood?
- Can you remember how you felt about participating in sport and physical activity?
- How did you feel about any changes in activities participated in?
- Did you enjoy sport and physical activity in your childhood?
- What were your preferred activities?
- As you look back now, do you have good memories of sport and physical activity in your childhood?
- Were you able to take part in as many activities/much of the activities as you wanted?
- What other things did you do in your spare time?

School Sport Questions:

- What memories do you have from sport/physical activities at school?
 - What memories do you have of PE and organised sport at school?
 - How did you feel about participating in PE/School sport?
 - How did PE compare to other lessons?
- Did you enjoy PE and sport at school?
- What were your preferred activities?
- As you look back now, do you have good memories of PE and sport at school?
- Do you think that sport and PE had an influence on you?
- Why do you think PE was provided by your school?
- What do you think PE was trying to achieve?

Adult life:

Introduction:

Let's move on. I want you to think now of memories of sport and physical activities from after your childhood.

Timeline introduction:

I'd like you to construct a timeline of key events in your life, and any sport and physical activity (in writing). This is to help you to think about your involvement in sport and physical activity at the time. It also allows me to collect some information about you, which will be useful for putting your sport memories into context. (Interviewer shows example). Some events might be short/one off's e.g. moving house, others might be continuous/longer events e.g. employment. You don't need to give detail about all the events, just tell me what you are comfortable with. So let's start the timeline off when you left school.

- What did you do on leaving school.....?

Interview Break:

15 minute break (sometimes longer). The **participant** may spend this time completing their timeline and sketch of adult sport participation. The **interviewer** uses the time to consider responses so far and formulate any additional questions.

Sketch of adult Sport participation:

- Can we go back through the timeline so that you can think about your sport and physical activity participation at the time of each event?
- What memories do you have about sport and physical activity at the time?
- Tell me about the activity.
- Why did you take the up the activity /or discontinue it? (Asked in response to each activity mentioned)
- What did it mean to you?
- How did you feel about it?
- What did you particularly like/dislike about it?
- What were your preferred activities?
- Have you ever owned any:
 - sports equipment, clothing,
 - sports club, gym memberships?Did you use them? Why/Why not?
- Have you ever done any home based sport and physical activity?
What did it mean to you?
- The sport and physical activity you did in adult life was similar/different to your childhood activity? (Question is phrased according to previous responses.)
Why do you think this is?
- Looking at the life events (e.g.) did they have any influence on your sport and physical activity participation?
Which events were the most influential on your participation?
(These questions will be asked if the time line shows that sport and physical activity participation and life events have changed at the same time. The interviewee may have already made a connection between them.)
- In adult life have you been able to do as much sport and physical activity as you've wanted to?
- You defined yourself as sporty/non-sporty as a child. Would you say your definition of yourself has remained the same throughout adult life?

Present Time and Future:

- Tell me about your sport and physical activity participation now.
- Describe any sport or physical activity you did in the last 2 weeks.
- What are your future intentions with regard to sport and physical activity t?
- Do you have any intentions to start taking part in sport and physical activity?

Summary Questions:

I'm now going to ask you some concluding questions, before we end the interview. These are questions for you to reflect on. There is no right or wrong answer; I'd just like to hear your thoughts.

- In adult life what influence would you say sport and physical activity has had on you?
- How would you evaluate how important sport and physical activity has been, within your life? How important is it now?
- Do you have any other memories/comments on sport and physical activity that you'd like to share with me?

Thank you very much for spending time with me and sharing your memories of sport and physical activity

END OF INTERVIEW

APPENDIX E

METHODS (FURTHER DETAIL)

Introduction

In Chapter 3 I explained the method of my study. I gave an over-view of the research methods, process and analysis I designed and implemented, and the following discussion adds to this. This discussion will allow the reader to understand more fully how the research was conducted and gives further explanation on data analysis decisions which will be useful for possible study repeats.

Interview tool

I started off each interview with the following statement: “I’d like to talk to you about your experiences in sport and physical activity throughout your life so far. What I’d really like to get from you is your life history in relation to those activities. When you’re remembering, things for me, try to think what it meant to you at the time, what you thought and felt about it. What I’m interested in is your story.” I wanted to ensure that participants felt able to tell me their own experiences and views. I maintained fairly unstructured and open sections on child and adult experiences, and this way I could see how they openly related to sport. I was careful to avoid over-structuring the interview schedule and I bore in mind the guidance of Burgos (1988) that in an effective life history interview, you should be able to ‘forget’ the questions, as these are not relevant to the structure of the narrative. Whilst I had some more structured questions, these were open, general and strategically placed as 2nd order questions, after open questioning. As the participants told their story they imposed their own questions, evaluations and descriptions, telling their story the way they wanted to. I focused on their narrative, not on each section as an answer to a question. Where appropriate I asked for more detail or clarification of what they were saying and encouraged them to tell me about examples and experiences. The ‘timeline’ tool that I introduced gave the participant, the opportunity to use their own framework for the interview, as the more structured, evaluatory questions came at the end of sections. I found that throughout the study most of the interviewees did seem to take the question and ‘run with it’, ‘talking at length’ on the topic. However, a few did constantly ask

for direction and reassurance that they were talking about useful material for the research. In the later interviews continued reassurance that I was interested in anything they had to say about sport and physical activity helped.

Linked to this issue the first interview participant, Andy suggested that a definition of sport should be given to the participant. He had considered talking about ‘rambling’, but was unsure whether I would perceive this to be a sport. I wanted to avoid defining sport, as I wanted to see the participants’ perceptions and the meaning they imbue to activities. At the time I was asking about sport and also physical activity. I felt that it was important to leave definitions to the subjects, otherwise there was little point looking at personal experiences of sport, if I was giving subjects a limiting definition to work from. As I discussed in chapter 1 previous studies used category systems to define sport that were often researcher driven. Hedges (1986) in his exploration of a leisure histories method allowed individuals to use self-definitions. However, on analysis the self-definitions were placed into categories, hence hiding individual interpretations. Hedges suggested that definitions of participation should be more structured in any future research. For example he suggests that instead of swimming, only competitive swimming should be included, as ‘swimming’ in-itself encompasses too many possible meanings. I disagreed with Hedges suggestion and wanted to explore the participant’s own definitions of ‘Sport’. Coalter (1999) in his critique of the GHS had concluded that people tended to under-estimate involvement in non-competitive sport, feeling that it did not fit into the categories stipulated. With this in mind I encouraged participants to define sport themselves and be reassured that their definition and the activities they chose to describe were ‘right’. In Hedges study subjects definitions of what activities they classed as sport or leisure varied e.g. dancing, snooker. This emphasises the idea that the same activity can have a different meaning. So throughout the interviews I left this open to the participant’s definition. I encouraged them to explore the meanings of the full range of physical activities regardless of whether they fell into conventional understandings of sport, and to talk about past and present meanings of sport to explore any changing sense of the activity. Most asked at some point how I defined sport and I responded by saying that I wanted to hear about their meaning and experiences. However, if they had asked, then at the end of the interview I did talk about my experiences of sport.

During my initial interviewing I also considered the participants abilities to articulate events and experiences, looking at the depth of history given to me. I spent some time reading and re-reading the first two interviews and I concluded that both the participants related to sport, showing participation patterns and giving some explanation for these. The degree to which people choose to see their relation to sport as significant will vary, and likewise the degree to which they will talk about it and give detail. The importance lay in looking at what they said. I began to notice that when I read the transcripts of those who said less, they did in fact show a great deal about their experience through body language, use of jokes to downplaying feelings and experiences, changing direction in the middle of comments, pausing or hesitations, giving what Pomerantz (1984) calls a 'token' agreement to a question or avoiding giving an answer completely. As I moved further into my interviewing I began to notice the nuances in the conversations and later I paid heed to the general principles of conversation analysis, an area explored further by Faulkner and Finlay (2002). I recorded pauses, and made notes where respondents stumbled or faltered with responses or appeared to change direction.

Timeline tool

In previous use, the researcher (Hedges, 1986) had written the participants age under each year and then asked them to note down significant life events, e.g. marriage, jobs, children, from a prompt list. Two types of events were suggested to participants, it could be a one-off event e.g. marriage, or could be continuous (indicated by a continuous line e.g. a job). In the blank section Hedges (1986) used the chart to stimulate the recall of descriptive data, on sport participation. As he states: "Respondents were next asked, for each sport on the age chart (i.e. each sport in which they had participated since school), what were the main reasons for taking it up and, if they had stopped participating, for discontinuing it. A brief 'thumbnail' sketch of participation (where, with whom) was also attempted." (Hedges, 1986 p.5) My approach in using the chart was very similar. I changed the chart to include only years at the top and asked subjects to record the year they left school as a starting point. I would then ask them to record significant life events, suggesting that they may find it easier to look back and remember their sport experience at the time. If they asked for advice, an example list of possibilities was given as a starting point. After this, they

were asked to record sport and physical activity participation as one off or continuous events.

Participants were given time to complete the timeline, after first exploring their childhood and youth experiences of sport. The timeline also provided a break in the interview where they had time to think and take a break. The timeline record was then used as the basis for the rest of the interview, so that participants' recollections and recording of significant events framed the interview direction. The participant and I would look at the timeline and I asked them to describe their sport experiences (most explained where they had participated, with whom, their reasons for take up, maintenance and discontinuity; and if they told me very little, then these aspects were also used as probes). I did not make reference to the life events whilst we were talking about the activity experiences, but the participants would often talk about life events and whether they were influential on the sport history, showing where they were significant. In an end section to the interview a direct question was used on the influence of the life events. Additionally the 'timelines' provided some biographical data to contextualise the sport experiences and from this I gained detail on family, relationship and work status, and highest qualification level.

The Interview process

The interviews took place either in the participant's own house, or on six occasions the interview took place in my office or a private work room and on one case in the interviewee's office. In the main interviews took place in the evenings and at weekends. In four cases I was invited to join the interviewee, for dinner, in two cases with their family. Interviews at house locations generally took place in the living room with the respondent and I sitting comfortably with tea/coffee. Location was vitally important in making subjects feel comfortable. Where possible I tried to arrange interviews in participants' homes where I would be seen more like a 'friendly guest' than interviewer (May, 1993), but for some this was not practical and they preferred to meet after work. Where interviews took place in my office, I was fortunate to have a large office with an area with easy chairs, so we sat in this area and I made sure that we both had drinks when we required them throughout the interview. In all work location based interviews we were fortunate not to have any

disturbances as most took place in the evening. Only in one case did I feel a respondent had 'work on their mind'. They had allocated 2.5 hours for the interview and this sense of them being less relaxed was during the last 30 minutes of the interview.

With the permission of the participants all interviews were tape recorded. This meant that I had a full record of each interview. I used a high specification, multi-directional microphone, attached to a Dictaphone. This had several advantages; it meant that the microphone would pick up both the participant and myself, rather than favouring the person the Dictaphone is next to, it picked up the participant even when they moved around the room and this was important as some moved to other seats or sat on the floor during and after completing their timeline, the microphone is the size of a 50 pence and so is no less discrete than the actual Dictaphone when placed beside it. After each interview I sat in my car or office for 15 minutes and made a few handwritten notes on body language, interesting aspects of, and my thoughts on, the interview. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and I tried to do complete these as close as possible to the interviews, however in a few cases the interviews remained untranscribed for a up to a month afterwards because of time pressures and I acknowledge that the ideal would be to build in immediate transcribing time to the research process. The transcribing of each interview is in itself a lengthy process and this often took a whole weekend or several evenings as I was working full time and as I do not 'touch-type'. However, the slow process provided me with the opportunity to listen again to the voices and embedded each person and their views in my mind. By the time I had finished the transcribing I found I could think quite naturally across the participants and remember their experiences and feelings they had described which proved very useful when moving onto data analysis.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data all interview transcripts were sent to the participants for their review and before leaving each participant I told them that this would happen. Each person was invited to: check for accuracy and clarify any responses they might want to and to return a reply slip to say that they had the opportunity to do so. All replied, with just three sending very brief notes on a couple of their comments and others just adding a note on how they had enjoyed the interview or wishing me luck with research completion.

The interview style

As I have already elaborated I had an interview schedule, but I wanted to strive for discrete, low key questioning and credulous listening so I used the list of questions as a prompt to turn to if the interviewee dried up. I avoided framing the participant's history, by leaving some sections of the interview clearly unstructured and open. Whilst it was no longer a pure open interview, I tried not to probe too much and made sure that I was an active listener, always acknowledging and encouraging responses. The interviews were enjoyable, but intensive and exhausting when they took place in the evenings, for me as the active listener. I made sure my interviews did not take place in the same week to avoid any fatigue impact. I wanted to make sure that "As I sat and listened, I learned the answers to questions that I would not even have had the sense to ask..."(Foote Whyte, 1968)

I needed to avoid talking too much and I made a deliberate effort not to respond with my own experiences, unless invited to. There were times when the participant asked my opinion on their responses, to which I reassured them 'that what they said was fine and all their experiences were really interesting and very useful to my study'. The interview itself was not intersubjective and in the main part, I did not share my experiences with them, but where I was asked to during the interview I usually answered briefly. However, after the interview, we would talk some more about the experiences they had described and I at their invitation would sometimes relate my experiences to this. At the start of the interview some participants needed reassurance, as they were nervous or unsure about the interview. I wanted to make sure that they would be encouraged to give their own perspectives and I tried to get as close as possible too the participants, by adapting some questions into the language used by the subject. Listening closely to the voices of the subjects was needed, as they make sense out of their social worlds and often saw their own contradictions and it was here that I was on hand to encourage them.

The direction of the interview was a design and process issue. I wanted to let the subject frame the interview and then encourage them to make their journey through it (Hitchcock, 1995). Ideally I wanted the format of interview to be circular, rather than

linear with the participant setting the dialogue and taking the direction that they choose (Dale, 1996). As I have already noted the interview schedule design and timeline tool was fairly linear, as the interview needed some framework. However, the introductory statement, provided the main guidance, encouraging them to give their own history and within the open sections (child and adult sport experiences) I did allow them to drift backwards and forwards through time and space, which appeared most appropriate to capture the subjective experience (Hitchcock, 1995). Later at the analysis stage, I did bear in mind the direction of the interview, as after transcription it can appear that events are frozen and sequence or causality ends up being suggested.

Therapy was not an aim of the interviews, but comments after interviews did demonstrate that they appeared to have some therapeutic effect. (Levison et al, 1978). John, one of my study participants commented that 'he had started to reflect on how certain things fit together, in a way that I haven't before. So it's been quite interesting'. This also suggests that the process of an interview, of reflecting on sport experiences, may mean that participants alter their current thoughts on sport participation. Some participants commented that they had realised that they 'now needed to do more physical activity'. All the participants commented on their enjoyment of the interview experience and nearly all had been keen to talk in depth about their experiences and feelings.

Data analysis decisions

Computer aided qualitative analysis

During the period of the first six interviews I had kept the data in mind by writing descriptive summaries of each participant, noting their description and evaluation of their sport identity. I then began to read and re-read the transcripts, and patterns emerging across the interviews were marked. To do this job more efficiently I decided to use computer-aided qualitative analysis (CAQDAS) in the form of QSR/NUDIST 4. I anticipated that this system would allow me to search the transcript texts to make comparisons across and within interviews and act as a container for these results. In NUDIST, I read my scripts and attached codes as meaning units and I then searched

through all the transcripts in order to code all these. From this coding I was able to build an index system of related ideas and make links between codes in order to create categories or themes.

However, I soon began to realise that there were problems and limitations in using CAQDAS to deal with less structured data i.e. the 'bigger chunks' of my participants open responses. To explain; on identifying a key word you may want to code this to a category. NUDIST will code the section containing the word (a section being the response to a question). If a subject talked in detail the section may be a paragraph or page, when returning to the coding later it is then hard to determine why the sections were coded, if the 'key word' is lost in text. This problem, where data are 'decontextualised' (Malson 2000, p.155), leaves the researcher unable to consider a "... 'holistic' interpretation" (Richards and Richards, 1998, p.229). The package may be more useful for shorter, structured interviews, where questions are to be compared. With in-depth and highly open-ended interview material it is difficult to see the data as a whole and I felt that I was losing the sense of the participants as individuals with their own views and histories. Whilst I could make extra notes on the specific code, such as its meaning and context, this was extra work when I could have highlighted the code on the transcript manually by hand or word processor in the first instance and looked to explore the context in which it was said. I felt constrained by the software and coding method and when I returned to writing on my transcripts free hand with 'pen and pencil' I felt ideas start to 'bloom' again. There has been discussion about the effect that CAQDAS will have on analysis. Richards and Richards (1998, p.214) suggest that software based data management methods "...must not get in the way, by distorting rich records, diluting "thick descriptions" or demanding routines that destroy insight." Unfortunately I found all these problems with my use of CAQDS and felt that I would not be close enough to the material to look for patterns and understand them from the data, which was critical for an inductive approach. I found it best to move on from NUDIST. I created print outs and then used a manual method to extend the coding diagrams I had created. This largely involved going back to the transcripts and repeating the same process of looking for similar ideas and experiences as codes. In the end NUDIST did not prove very useful and I ended up with a traditional process of reading and re-reading transcripts, noting down common themes.

Voice Centre Relational Method (VCR) of data analysis

After becoming aware of VCR I went onto read Brown and Gilligan's (1992, 1993) original writings on the 'voice-centred relational method'. It focuses on looking at the narrative account, in relation to the people around the individual and broader structural contexts. This would allow me to look closely at each individual participant's transcript, whilst considering them as an 'active' and 'relational' self, in relationship to self, others and society. At the same time I could pay some attention to the way the story was told and the language used (as in Thomsson, 1999). The method of data analysis is an attempt to link the ontology to methodology. In common with a grounded theory approach, the method focuses on transmitting the 'voices' from the data through the analysis stage (Olesen, 1994). I was attracted by the focus on the individual's voice, whilst acknowledging the researcher's voice and perspective. The staged readings and analyses incorporate the relationship between the researcher and the researched.

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